"I Don't Know Much About History": WCWM's Educational Radio Format and its Battle for Self Definition

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by

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Preface

I first became aware of WCWM's archives as I began my tenure as station manager in the summer of 2005. A disc jockey at the station since 2004, I was deeply involved in both the station's operations and policy making, and wished to learn more about the station's past. I began sorting through the station's unorganized mass of documents dating back to the late 1950's, and decided to expand the project to include station alumni voices. Over the past year, I have corresponded with dozens of alumni, and formerly interviewed ten former staff. I also used my current position as alumni liaison for the station to organize a staff reunion and publish an online alumni magazine. I used the data I collected from these sources in writing this thesis.

Because I was a disc jockey, I believe I was able to better interview my informants than if I had been unaffiliated with WCWM. Although we may have been born as many as fifty years apart, I think our common experience as station staff made the interviewing process much easier. I came to the project hoping to see how their accomplishments informed my own radio experience. However, being deeply involved at the station made objective reporting at times very difficult. At times it felt as though criticizing a fellow disc jockey for certain policy decisions was tantamount to betraying his or her trust. In other cases, my desire to be as accurate as possible made balancing conflicting oral accounts and documented reports difficult. I wanted to give participants the greatest amount of freedom in sharing their stories, but I had to ensure that the narrative adhered to what I felt was the truth.

I would like to thank the following alumni for assisting me during my thesis: James Sawyer, Al Louer, Frank Bacskay, Bob Thompson, Cary Hoagland, Mary Cottrill, David Oxenford, Rick Potter, Tom Brooke, Bob Evans, Charlie Dent, Charles Woodliff, Karen Schoemer, Art Stukas, and many, many others.

Introduction

In 1960, *The Flat Hat*, the College of William and Mary's student newspaper, accused the school's radio station—WCWM-FM—of "purging" entertaining rock programs in favor of dour "classical stuff we heard before."[1] Disgruntled radio staff member Dick Silverman complained not only that WCWM's management ignored student programming taste, but that the preferred classical music and informative material was "nauseating." WCWM's leadership disagreed. In a scathing letter to *The Flat Hat* editor, Traffic and Continuity Director Dorothy "Kitten" Keaton outlined the station's goals: "WCWM is an educational station… [That] means no commercials, no 'nifty fifty,' and no personality shows. The primary purpose of an educational station is to present music and programs of interest to the college community in the broadest sense."[2] While Keaton not only echoed the high-culture sentiments found in WCWM's 1958 charter, her statement also highlighted the controversy surrounding noncommercial educational radio as a whole.

The editorial dispute between the paper and station staff framed a larger controversy facing Communication Departments nationwide, as noncommercial radio stations attempted to define their role on campus and in the wider community. Should noncommercial stations answer to the educational needs of their students or to a larger, more diverse audience? What educational model should broadcasters use to most effectively disseminate information? Should programming decisions be limited to a centralized faculty authority, or distributed among station staff and the community members? Disagreements over educational radio's appropriate leadership, mission, audience, and programming reflected postwar social, political, and economic upheaval. WCWM response to these wider cultural debates made it a fitting

[1] Dick Silverman, "Entertainment," The Flat Hat, 6 February 1960, 11.
[2] Kitten Keaton, "WCWM Official Comments on Column," *The Flat Hat*, 1 March 1960, 4.

microcosm of radio's evolving mission. Throughout its 50-year history, its progression is similar to that of noncommercial stations across the country. As it answered wider cultural debates, WCWM shifted from a 1960's faculty-supervised organization maintaining high-culture values, to a 1970's hang-out for social misfits and music-obsessed leftists, to its present status as dogged champion of "alternative" music.

While relatively little has been written about educational institutional radio, WCWM's own archive abounds with information about its beginnings, its operation, and its jousts with students and the administration. By charting WCWM's progress from a faculty to student-run organization, I hope to elucidate the manner in which arguments about educational broadcasting evolved, not only from educational broadcasters' perspectives, but from college, community, and governmental perspectives as well. How WCWM balanced its own interests while responding to wider social pressures from outside and inside the station reflects a common experience other institutional stations shared.

Noncommercial Radio's Emergence

While the concept of educational radio has changed dramatically over the course of the format's 80-year history, what remains constant is its inherently political nature. Noncommercial broadcasters had to constantly justify their existence to a society in which government-approved commercial radio's entertainment format seemed preferable to vaguely-defined educational radio. Significantly, educational radio's mission had been murky since the medium's popularization in the 1920's. Radio scholar Michele Hilmes writes that during radio's formative years, consumers and policymakers alike disputed the "inevitability of commercial broadcasting" and radio's position as a cultural authority.[3] Yet both noncommercial radio's

[3] Michele Hilmes, *Radio Voices: American Broadcasting, 1922-1952* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press: 1997), 8.

effectiveness and expansion had been repeatedly stymied by broadcast regulatory agencies' failure to protect these stations from commercial competition. By the late 1920's, Hilmes argues, "the public interest had become defined as the commercial interest."[4] Radio historian Sydney Head concurs that educational radio's uncertain future dissuaded noncommercial broadcasters from "resist[ing] when commercial interests moved to capture their licenses."[5] Educators hoped that the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) would offer them shelter from commercial broadcasters who, as radio reformer Llewellyn White wrote, "brow-beat the federal regulatory body into squeezing the 'long-hairs' out of the picture."[6]

However, with the development of the FM frequency, educational broadcasters looked to the technology as a "possible solution to the educator-commercial competition for the limited number of frequencies."[7] Finally, in 1948, the FCC made available inexpensive 10-watt, low-power FM frequencies for educational broadcast use. As Paul Riismandel writes, these would encourage "educational institutions to establish stations on the largely vacant educational FM band."[8] The prospect of applying for an FM license appealed to William and Mary as well as many other universities, since low power stations were inexpensive, easy to operate, and of little threat to the AM band's commercial monoliths.[9]

Radio as a Cultural Force

[4] Hilmes 10. See also Paul Riismandel, "Radio by and for the Public: The Death and Resurrection of Low-Power Radio," in *Radio Reader*, eds. Michele Hilmes and Jason Loviglio (New York and London: Routledge, 2002). See also Jack Mitchell, "Lead Us not into Temptation: American Public Radio in a World of Infinite Possibilities," in *Radio Reader.*
[5] Sydney W. Head, *Broadcasting in America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1976), 125.
[6] Llewellyn White, *The American Radio: A Report on the Broadcasting Industry in the United States from The Commission on Freedom of the Press* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press: 1947)108.
[7] Gail Eveland, "A Study and Analysis of 1956-57 Programs Broadcast by Educational Radio Stations in the United States" (masters thesis, University of Florida, 1958), 2.
[8] Riismandel 429.
[9] Eric Rothenbuhler and Tom McCourt, "Radio Redefines Itself, 1947-1962," in *Radio Reader* 380.

While FM radio allowed noncommercial broadcasters a reprieve from commercial competition, this did not ease debates over educational programming. As commercial radio's emergence excited public controversy over its status as a powerful cultural force, so too did radio listeners dispute noncommercial radio's claim to cultural authority. Public suspicion of a communication form that could both promise cultural uplift and disseminate virulent mass consumerism persisted well into the 1980's. Michele Hilmes writes that radio in general embodied a "conflicting dual function of upholding cultural standards while selling goods to the public, creating the tension between official and popular culture."[10] While mass media signaled an unprecedented consumer access to goods and services "through mass distribution and advertising support," radio also allowed previously isolated populations to participate in a national culture. Hilmes continues that broadcasters "oriented themselves to a broader segment of the U.S. public than ever before, evoking, as we have seen, both utopian visions of cultural community and fears of the erosion of cultural standards."[11] Indeed, noncommercial radio in particular claimed that its programming was not "a 'blue sky' culture. Most of it is real and reachable, parts of most communities discovered and examined for everyone's appreciation… Out of all these [programs] come understanding, more solid perhaps a term than 'cultural enrichment.'"[12] These competing views of radio as harbinger of a diluted mass culture or conservator and creator of national heritage are reflected in many scholarly journals, as academics from the 1920's to the 1980's elaborated on radio's possible value to the country.

Academic Debates

[10] Hilmes 33.
[11] Hilmes 28.
[12] Herman W. Land Associates, *The Hidden Medium; A Status Report on Educational Radio in the United States* (New York: Herman W. Land Associates, 1967), ii-27.

Noncommercial radio programming as a whole was subject to the vagaries of academic theory, adding to the confusion surrounding its mission. Contemporary research, unpublished theses, and dissertations reveal radio's superimposition of one educational theory on another without first examining the perceivable effects of each model on the medium and its audience. Between the late 1940's and 1970's, educational broadcast literature espoused varying types of cultural transmission that ranged from targeting only the educated elite, to supporting general continuing education, to informing Cold War audiences of their rights and responsibilities as democratic citizens, to providing a broadcasting laboratory for students enrolled in communications courses. Rather than carefully evaluating possible programming formats that would most benefit the listener, educational radio discourse instead imposed its own set of cultural ideologies onto the medium. Few academics questioned the cultural assumptions embedded in their educational theories, and when noncommercial radio failed to appeal to a broad public, many lost interest in the form altogether.

Noncommercial Radio as High-Culture Disseminator

Material published in the 1950's and early 1960's advanced a high-culture argument that privileged Western classical music, poetry, and modes of thought as the best way to instruct the American public about its cultural heritage. For example, Gail Eveland's 1958 masters thesis assumed that "serious" or classical music and news programs should carry the weight of the educational broadcaster's message, and labeled jazz, folk, or popular music insufficient for radio's educational mission.[13] While these educators believed that disseminating Beethoven to the masses would engage and elevate the audience, this Eurocentric programming was easily manipulated to suit Cold War interests by quashing competing notions of Americanness and

[13] Eveland 25-27.

presenting a unified, sophisticated, and patriotic image of the nation. Linked to 1950's high-culture ideals was broadcasters' effort to disseminate democratic values to American citizens.

Noncommercial Radio as *Vox Populi*

As the 1960's progressed, educational stations reevaluated their position within a rapidly changing social landscape. The belief among some educators that institutionalized educational programming was the best and only way to inform a diverse public conflicted with a later movement in the 1960's and 1970's toward providing populist programming to the public. Dissatisfied with high-cultural models that limited cultural programming to classical music and literature readings, these broadcasters argued that education should reflect social activism rather than sterile academic theory or individual taste. Stations subscribing to such ideology embraced participatory democracy, community-centered programming, and a regimen of music, public affairs, and politics.[14] Additionally, by devoting airtime to multicultural issues relevant to local and national listeners alike, these broadcasters hoped to offer a more inclusive definition of America.

However, these critics ignored a central question: Did the diverse programming guarantee quality programming? Was one type of programming any more educational than another? For example, in 1967 Herman W. Land Associates compiled an in-depth report on educational radio for the National Association of Educational Broadcasters (NAEB) that analyzed the strengths and weakness of noncommercial radio stations and measured their importance to the American public.[15] The report found that despite budget limitations, educational broadcasters offered an increasingly broad range of quality cultural programming to a diverse segment of the listening public. What the report neglected to elucidate, however, was the goal and outcome of such

[14] Mitchell 412.
[15] Herman W. Land Associates.

cultural programming; NAEB did not evaluate whether the presence of these programs effectively fostered an understanding of a multicultural America.

Frustrated with the inwardly political nature of poorly-funded noncommercial radio stations, late 1960's educators advised that stations look beyond their immediate fiscal concerns to engage with current national cultural and political debates. Donald Ray Martin's 1968 dissertation, for example, argued that noncommercial radio's reliance on its founding institution for financial support unduly politicized programming and funding decisions.[16] Their budgets controlled by the administration, small stations reflected "public relations efforts of the school[s]," yet as instruments of their communications departments, these stations also served as faculty laboratories for communications students. Martin also acknowledged that many students at noncommercial stations "regard[ed] the station as an entertaining extra-curricular activity," while the "outlying community demand[ed] the FM station to conform to public interest."[17] Ultimately, Martin cited limited station budgets; competing administration, faculty, student staff, and community interests; and conflicting opinions on the most effective educational broadcasting technique as factors most detrimental to a small station's success. As a medium that reached the surrounding community, noncommercial radio reflected the uneasy role colleges occupied within their town: should their programs and services cater exclusively to the wishes of their students or to the needs of nearby residents?

By the late 1960's and early 1970's, broadcast scholars and instructors like Martin argued that "quality programming has value only if someone hears it," hinting that commercial-educational hybrid would resurrect radio.[18] Patricia Holp, another noncommercial radio scholar,

[16] Donald Ray Martin, "A Study of Definitions and Attitudes toward a Small College Non-commercial Educational FM Radio Station" (PhD diss., Ohio State University, 1968).
[17] Martin 5.
[18] Mitchell 411.

argued in her 1974 thesis that traditional institutionalized visions of noncommercial radio did not adequately meet educational demands; instead she posited that stations should model their programming after the nascent public radio format of the late 1960's.[19] Holp's attack on high-culture educational programming echoed WCWM's own debate over which broadcasting format most effectively disseminated informative material to the listening public; whether it be a view privileging Western notions of culture and information, or a newer, more democratic fusion of education and entertainment. By abolishing older visions of education, however, proponents of this synthesis inched closer to commercial models.

WCWM's Archive

In contrast to broadcast literature and scholarly material that attempted to impose theories on noncommercial stations without regard to their consequences, WCWM's archive reveals a station gradually exploring its mission to William and Mary students and its role as an educational medium. The station's charter, photographs, yearbooks, press clippings, station log books, letters, and music reviews flesh out a dynamic relationship between the station and contemporary cultural and social debates. WCWM's 1958 charter, for example, outlined the station's relationship to the school and community. The document identified WCWM's primary goal as an educational radio station, and established it within the administrative and faculty hierarchy. The charter also hinted at the College's restrictions on the stations' content through administrative power to review all programming decisions. While the charter offered idealistic visions of what the station could achieve, *The Flat Hat* articles dating from 1956 to the present chart a more contested station development. Most interesting is the paper's letters to the editor section in which the general student population, WCWM, and *The Flat Hat* staff waged periodic

[19] Patricia Holp, "Format Public Radio: An Alternative for Educational Radio" (masters thesis, University of Akron, 1974).

battles over educational broadcasting's role on campus. In these letters, "educational programming" is often equated with musical and instructional elitism. Students complained that the station was too exclusive and failed to reflect their musical interests. The controversy did not abate over the years, although mid-1970's station staff attempted to justify their programming by balancing Top-40 rock with punk, avant-garde, and less popular musical genres.[20] Later debate grew increasingly heated as the station struggled to define itself against students' increasingly vocal accusations of exclusiveness.

Another source rich with information about the station's identity is WCWM's traffic and continuity log. Mandated by the FCC, WCWM staff documented daily station operations in their record book. By the late 1980's the log book had evolved into a message and discussion board for student directors to debate the merits of current station playlists, staff professionalism, and non-DJ opinions of programming. The log book messages are most heated and impassioned regarding WCWM's role on campus. While many rank-and-file staff members felt the station should appeal to campus tastes by playing mainstream hits, others, particularly student directors, keenly felt that the station's mission was to expose listeners to unique, little-known, and therefore, more "educational" recordings, regardless of the music's "accessibility." An ongoing debate that lasted for years, these screeds revealed the staff's ambivalence over WCWM's educational mission.

Similar to the station log books are director-to-director letters that frequently outline the station's annual goals. Passionate about WCWM's position within the progressive music industry, some 1970's directors devoted their correspondence to defining "Radio Free Williamsburg's" greater purpose. Their vision of the station included providing free-form, unregulated blocks of music and news, with a mandate that on-air behavior conform to a laid-

[20] Jamie Benshoff, "WCWM Returns After Silence," *The Flat Hat*, 9 February 1972, 3.

back, progressive radio archetype, which consciously rejected the high energy Top-40 commercial radio style. These letters also contained assumptions about what makes "quality" educational radio, even if these views are often presented in terms of musical programming and radio philosophy.

Written documents, however, often obscured the broader attitudes of station staff and the campus as a whole. I have also relied upon my own correspondence with former station staff, as well as on oral interviews I conducted to further develop WCWM's history and connect it to wider educational debates. Interviewees offered a more nuanced perspective on WCWM. While many alumni were happy to share their experiences working at the station, some interviewees unearthed long-suppressed uneasiness over the position of gender, race, and class issues at the station, and also elucidated the influence non-DJs, faculty, and the wider Williamsburg community had on the station. The new and sometimes unexpected content of these interviews simultaneously complicated and enriched the already complex history of the station, further enmeshing it in the cultural and social politics of the day. It also presented an interesting challenge as I attempted to balance conflicting accounts, both written and oral, with my own interpretation of events.

WCWM's Beginnings: 1956

In the 1950's, WCWM's transformation from a student-centered popular music station to a high-culture model illustrates the kind of cultural divides evident in contemporary educational radio debates. The result of radio enthusiast and William and Mary sophomore Ted Hunnicutt's 65-page proposal to College president Alvin Duke Chandler, WCWM commenced broadcasting in the spring of 1956 as a student-run, semi-commercial AM station run through the college's

electrical circuitry.[21] In an interview with *The Flat Hat*, Hunnicutt declared that WCWM's mission was to play music with broad appeal, and was to be "run for the pleasure of the students, at the pleasure of the students."[22] Bob Blase, a WCWM alumnus, remembers that "at that time there was a thirst for a campus radio station as the rock 'n' roll revolution was catching fire nationwide and the students had scant access to this music on stodgy area stations [,] which were few in number. The alternatives were the 50-100,000 watt giants coming on line at night."[23] Hunnicutt relied on a faculty adviser and a staff of 64 students to program news, drama, classical, background or "muzak" entertainment, a few hours of rock and roll, and an hour of 1950's rhythm and blues.[24] The weekend featured the programs *The Big "Top Ten"* and *House Party*, most likely pop and rock and roll shows.[25]

While both the popularity of the station on campus and its increasing advertising revenue offset the station's production costs, WCWM quickly succumbed to wider financial woes. Program director Fred Shaffer attributed the station's failure to the lack of administration interest and financial support.[26] Instead, the College applied for its own 10-watt FM noncommercial educational license in 1957, and in the fall of 1959 WCWM-FM broadcast its first show from the newly constructed Phi Beta Kappa Hall.[27] President Chandler shifted the station's target audience away from the student population and toward the Williamsburg community. The new educational station would "program in the best interest of the College and in a manner representative of what the College stands for and its meaning and significance in the

[21] John P. Montgomery, "College to Operate Own Radio Station," *The Flat Hat*, 10 May 1958, 1.
[22] "WCWM to Develop as Campus Network for W&M Students," *The Flat Hat*, 27 March, 1956, 1.
[23] Bob Blase, "'And Then There was WCWM': A Short History," *WCWM Pin-Ups*, no. 2 (January/February 2006), http://www.wm.edu/so/wcwm/alumni/02/index2.html.
[24] Fred Shaffer, "Discloses Reason for Failure," *The Flat Hat*, 10 March 1959, 4.
[25] "Program Schedule for WCWM," *The Flat Hat*, 8 May 1956, 5.
[26] Shaffer 4.
[27] "WCWM to Commence Operations with Daily Broadcasts on FM Band," *The Flat Hat*, 22 September 1959, 15.

community."[28] Subject to the control of the administration, a board of faculty members, and the supervising Theatre and Speech Department, the nascent radio station operated as a classroom laboratory for communications students, as well as a handy public relations service for the College.

WCWM as a High-Culture Proponent: 1958-1967

That the popular music programs and commercial AM-disc jockey-derived announcing style quickly disappeared after WCWM resurfaced as a faculty-administered FM station emphasized WCWM's possible role as a station catering to the surrounding community. After a brief flirtation with student "personality shows" centered around popular music and a charismatic disc jockey, by 1960 faculty advisers formally abandoned this format in favor of "a new schedule…of higher quality" befitting an educational institution. Adhering to high-culture values, faculty and some student staff felt noncommercial programming should "be centered around the material present, *not* the personality."[29] When reporters from William and Mary's newspaper *The Flat Hat* commented that the station programmed mostly classical music with limited student support, faculty adviser Charles Woodliff argued that "this may be snobbish, but the College is interested in a high cultural level and we are trying to implement this."[30] The William and Mary administration did not want its students to dance; it wanted them to sit down and absorb their European cultural heritage.

Hinting at the ambivalence surrounding the role of college educational radio, William and Mary's administration required that WCWM follow a high-culture format without mandating other traditionally educational material such as news and public affairs programming.

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[28] Alvin Duke Chandler, "WCWM Charter," 30 September, 1958, 5.
[29] Keaton 4.
[30] Tom Hayden and Allan C Brownfield, "Station Head Discusses Problems in Operating College Radio Station," *The Flat Hat*, 1 March 1960, 1.

Western literature and classical music was deemed sufficiently educational without jeopardizing the College's reputation as respectable institution. Charles Woodliff, faculty adviser from 1958 to 1960, remembered that like many other universities, the school's administration "was not particularly concerned about carrying College news and information to the community" that did not improve the College's image.[31] While President Chandler mandated that WCWM perform a "high-quality service with emphasis on serious music, educational offerings, and public service," the administration was more interested in fostering favorable impressions about the school to the outlying community than providing specific educational broadcasting policies.[32] According to Chandler, WCWM should present programs with "a quality and dignity befitting the good name of the College and the Commonwealth of Virginia of which the College is an integral part," implying that controversial material had no place on the station.[33]

With the aid of WCWM's second faculty adviser Jim Sawyer, by the mid-1960's WCWM continued its struggle to become its own entity rather than remain a mouthpiece of the College. As a "quasi-educational" station, in Sawyer's words, the station modeled its programming after other educational stations' schedules, which favored background or classical music.[34] Drawing from educational broadcasting literature and radio industry publications, Sawyer labored to transform WCWM from simply an extension of the Radio and Television curriculum into a powerful FM station in its own right. Broader trends in educational programming shaped WCWM's early to mid-1960's schedule by stressing the importance of public affairs, news, and information programming, and training students in "real-world" journalism by offering local reporting assignments. To this end, WCWM employed the FCC's

[31] Charles Woodliff, e-mail messaege to author, November 1, 2006.
[32] Chandler 5.
[33] Chandler 1.
[34] James Sawyer interview, conducted by the author, April 4, 2006, Williamsburg, Virginia.

democratic mission by programming news reports, faculty roundtables, and lectures, but the station's operation primarily filled other needs.[35] WCWM's participation in tape exchange networks, competition with the school newspaper *The Flat Hat* for campus reporting authority, and the evolution of a large broadcasting range through the partnership with Yorktown High School's WYCS and other Virginian stations propelled WCWM into the midst of yet another national reevaluation of educational broadcasting.[36] While Sawyer maintained a rigid hierarchy of "quality" music and programming, there was room for student discussion and musical expression beyond traditional notions of high cultural practice. In essence, WCWM was no longer a radio laboratory; it now engaged in wider debates within the commercial and noncommercial radio industry.

Sawyer, however, appeared caught among several competing entities seeking control over WCWM's programming. As one alumnus explained, although Sawyer "tried to work with us" in scheduling content satisfactory to student staff and listeners, he also felt an obligation to maintain the College's educational policies, which were sometimes at odds with student musical preferences. As faculty adviser, Sawyer enforced the regulations the administration imposed, at times restricting material the school found too controversial or otherwise unbefitting of its image.[37] For example, the College was extremely reluctant to allow student announcers to discuss the escalation of the Vietnam War and subsequent student protest, fearing that radio editorials would contribute to student unrest.[38]

The Influence of Commercial Radio on WCWM: 1965-1970

[35] "WCWM Log: Program Schedule for WCWM (FM) 89.1 Mc.," *The Flat Hat*, September 29, 1959.
[36] Sawyer.
[37] Anonymous.
[38] Sawyer.

However, over the 1960's, educational radio broadcasters, including those at WCWM, increasingly debated the origins, goals, and recipients of programming. The manner in which WCWM disc jockeys presented themselves in student and local media began to reflect the hybrid of commercial AM and progressive FM radio styles that was gaining currency at other educational stations, and which was anathema to previous educational policies. As educational FM stations bore associations of academic elitism, some students attempted to inject strains of Top 40 music and vocal stylings into WCWM's staid schedule of classical music, easy-listening, and light jazz. A small allowance for rock programming should not be confused with open-armed acceptance of the form; rather, the music was carefully contained to weekend spots and the occasional rock marathon. While traditional notions of classical or semi-classical music as "superior" to other musical forms continued to dictate most programming decisions, students were increasingly successful in challenging traditional assumptions of musical value.

Student Control at WCWM: 1967-1972

Fittingly, the first sign that faculty and administrative control over programming content was waning was the station's 1967 programming reformatting, which devoted large chunks of the schedule to rock and roll. While the reasons for this reformatting are unclear, by the late 1960's the William and Mary administration was beginning to respond to the nationwide debate over *in loco parentis* and strict control over student affairs. WCWM's 1967 student station manager Mike Campana "eliminate[d] the two to three hour blocks of educational information currently broadcast, and…provide[d] music almost all day."[39] This was a dramatic ideological shift that not only granted students greater control over programming decisions, but also reflected a broader revolution in noncommercial programming philosophy, namely, the idea that popular music could be educational. As Campana stated, "rather than forsaking our educational

[39] Cheryl Krupa, "New Music Format Readied by WCWM," *The Flat Hat*, 6 February 1970, 3B.

mission [by broadcasting predominantly music programming], we are presenting the information in a more palatable form."[40] As music became increasingly political, pop music programming challenged the classical and semi-classical programming options mandated by the College administration.

Additionally, by the end of the 1960's, WCWM's student staff was determined to air nuanced public affairs and current events material it believed was vital to understanding contemporary society. The staff's persistence only grew stronger as high ranking directors joined campus political demonstrations or otherwise identified themselves with the rebellious youth movement. Students influenced by underground radio stations' political and musical subversion also began to challenge traditional notions of gender and generational roles in determining taste, staff, programming, and audience needs.

By the end of the 1960's, the college administration became more willing to tolerate student opinion, which contributed to WCWM's greater student involvement and ultimate break with the Theater and Speech Department. Another factor was faculty advisers' increasing inability to adequately split their time between their teaching and managerial duties.[41] Students pressured the administration and faculty supervisors to increase staff authority over programming decisions, first working to involve WCWM in the leftist issues of the day and then reforming old faculty-run policies to balance education with entertainment.[42] The combined forces of administrative disinterest in the station's affairs, faculty unwillingness to divide their duties between WCWM and their instruction, and student lobbying for increased power escalated until WCWM officially severed ties with the Theater and Speech Department in 1970. It joined

[40] Mike Campana, quoted by Cheryl Krupa 3B.
[41] Mosher interview.
[42] "Stanners WCWM Chief," *The Flat Hat*, 3 April 1970, 5.

the Publications Council in 1971, the governing body of student publications that set budgets, elected editors and now, station managers.

I will examine the ways in which WCWM reflected and responded to the changing goals of educational radio, as well as the tensions between faculty and student participation. Over time, WCWM transformed from the College's public relations tool in the 1950's, to a sophisticated news and music station dedicated to informing and elevating its public in the 1960's, to a student-run "progressive" station espousing little-heard music as an educational force in the 1970's and 1980's. These changes reflected contemporaneous national attempts to answer educational radio's problem of who it should serve and who should determine its goals. Should educational radio follow university-inspired educational policies, or should it enlist the aid of diverse audiences to create original and inclusive programming? Should it remain strictly "educational" or should it mimic commercial radio's entertainment-centered programming in order to maintain listenership? How should the university station balance the different interests of community, campus, staff, and students into its programming schedule? And if there is no faculty supervisor, as evidenced in WCWM's later history, how should student disc jockeys maintain a sense of what is suitably "educational"? Importantly, the idea that an educational station must disseminate "quality" and "educational" music to a wider public has persisted, although the genres and the purveyors of "serious" programming have changed over time.

In Chapter One I discuss WCWM's faculty supervised educational format that existed from 1959 to 1970. Educators' debates over how to define non-commercial radio's policies is replicated in WCWM's evolving programming schedule as well as its internal organization structure and publicity efforts. Cold War-era efforts to instruct citizens in their duties as Americans mingled with high-culture assumptions of what made programming educational,

often holding classical music and Western literary appreciation as true markers of informative radio. Fittingly, WCWM programmed mostly classical music during its first few years of operation, and faculty and student staff defended these selections by pointing to their supposedly inherent educational features. By the late 1960's, broader efforts to include "minority" perspectives in public affairs and programming content reflected WCWM's attempts to wrestle with not only contemporary domestic and foreign affairs coverage, but also with the very assumption that white male radio personnel had a greater claim to the airwaves than their peers. I also look at influential convention reports from commercial broadcasters as well as reminiscences from student and staff about the roots of WCWM's programming policies.

In Chapter Two I examine WCWM's transition from a faculty-supervised entity into a completely student-run body in 1972. I will also analyze how notions of educational music and educational programming continued to influence and inform discussions of programming despite the recent break with formal faculty supervision. Responding to wider social dramas about the autonomy of students and their authority to make decisions about their own educational experience, WCWM student staff increasingly demanded that programming reflect relevant campus and social issues. Changes within the radio industry itself necessitated a break with traditional educational policy as educational stations sought to attract a larger audience by adopting the emergent public radio's combination of educational and commercial radio-friendly entertainment. From 1970 to 1973 or so, alternative FM programming expanded its influence over non-commercial stations through imaginative programming content and structuring. Slowly, WCWM's educational policies shifted from the top-down educational approach that had elevated classical music to a more democratic system that embraced progressive and world music, community participation, investigative journalism, and the equality of gender in all

decision-making capacities. That this pluralist programming attitude did not survive the decade speaks to the continued ambiguity of educational radio's place in society.

In Chapter Three I examine the lasting power of educational programming in a now mature radio station. Always marginalized compared to the large commercial AM and FM stations, throughout its history WCWM carefully defined itself against an "obvious" evil: a mainstream culture bereft of educational content in its slavishness to rigidly categorized niche markets. While WCWM's definition of education has run the gamut from classical, social and politically conscious progressive music, and 1980s college rock, the station's mandate to educate the public has persisted. Until quite recently, staff articulated an "us versus them" mentality that set the station at odds with the school, the administration, other students, and commercial radio as DJs constantly recreate and critique WCWM's already highly self-conscious creation of station identity. Regardless of whether a faculty supervisor or student station manager operates the station, staff still voice strong opinions about what WCWM should be playing, saying, or sponsoring in order to educate the public. I delve into the way in which these issues of self definition persist from the 1970's into the present. The balance between the station as "educational" and the station as a representative of the student body is frequently debated among station staff and student body in general as the question remains: what is educational radio?

Chapter One: WCWM's Formation and Post World War II Noncommercial Radio

Emboldened by the United States' emergence as a world power at the end of World War II, educational radio broadcasters began to rethink their purpose. After the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) established a separate frequency for educational broadcast use in 1948, noncommercial stations hoped the newly available FM band would revitalize a stagnating and increasingly marginalized educational medium. Unfortunately, the lack of a coherent educational model mired broadcasters in a tangle of conflicting interests. On the one hand, broadcasters disagreed over whether noncommercial stations should function as vocational laboratories for communications students or whether they should focus on instructing the surrounding, non-student community. On the other hand, they also disagreed over the kind of cultural transmission noncommercial radio should convey. The government-supported imperative to define and protect American culture against Soviet ideology pressured 1950's and 1960's noncommercial programmers to emphasize civic education. However, while many of these broadcasters during the 1950's believed that propagating high-culture standards among the listening audience would crystallize American identity, by the 1960's other educators rejected the idea that one set of cultural standards could represent an entire nation. Instead, these noncommercial stations attempted to democratize programming and operating policies in order to make educational programming more responsive to audience's needs. During the 1950's and 1960's, WCWM oscillated between these two very different perspectives. While the station's early years featured classical music and "background" music programming with little community-driven content, by the mid-1960's WCWM embraced a variety of cultural and political perspectives, delivering national news programming, student-produced campus affairs programming, and a wider variety of musical selections.

Noncommercial Radio and the Cold War

While noncommercial stations had lagged behind commercial radio in support, funding, longevity, and listener interest for decades, postwar broadcasters hoped to reinvigorate their languishing institutions by shifting their frequencies to the FM band. The FCC's 1948 promise of funding and support for noncommercial stations brought a renewed interest in the educational power of radio, often synonymous with civic education. Under postwar threat of Communist ideology, Cold War-era broadcasters focused educational programming policy on fostering civic responsibility and patriotism in their listeners. FCC chairman Wayne Coy wrote to educational broadcasters in 1948, predicting that as "tomorrow's world will be an electronic world," a radio educator's patriotic duty was to disseminate civic "knowledge to the public."[43] Describing radio as a "precision aid for education," the FCC hoped that noncommercial stations would "make use of an instructional technique on even terms with science, industry, and invention."[44] Although Coy claimed that the FCC's mission was to promote "a free flow of ideas and understanding between people, classes, and nations…[as] the only sure road to a secure future," in reality this exchange extended only to the dissemination of capitalist ideology.[45]

More than a decade later, the network manager of the National Association of Educational Broadcasters (NAEB), Robert Underwood, Jr., repeated this admonition. Underwood warned that "no serious-minded person can deny the enormity of the [Communist] threat not only to our country, but to the whole of Western civilization."[46] To combat this elusive evil, noncommercial station programming such as public affairs and cultural programs were anchored in "democratic" values. Broadcasts briefed citizens on important national and

[43] Wayne Coy, introduction to *FM for Education*, by Franklin Dunham (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Office of Education, 1948), v.
[44] Dunham 2.
[45] Coy v.
[46] National Association of Educational Broadcasters, *Educational Radio-TV Convention Issue*, (October 1961), 22.

international events, promoted discussion and encouraged civic participation. Most importantly, these programs claimed to refine public taste and make accessible Anglo-American cultural heritage. Underwood argued that NAEB's tape distribution network, a system whereby NAEB-sponsored educational programs were mailed to affiliated noncommercial stations, would do everything "within [its] power to develop such a [democratic] citizenry."[47] Educational broadcasting, Underwood and others claimed, engendered civic preparedness even as this dogmatism also exacerbated U.S.-Soviet cultural divides.

As anticommunist ideologues stressed the importance of disseminating Anglo-American cultural programming as a means of reinforcing democratic values, many broadcasters believed they were responsible for the survival of American culture and democracy. While Underwood encouraged noncommercial stations to program informative and enlightening material, others advocated a more moderate, tentative news-gathering approach to avoid alienating advertising sponsors or patrons. Unwilling to risk censure for un-American sentiments, commercial radio and even some noncommercial stations—particularly those under the close supervision of their funding source—hesitated before airing potentially controversial programming, a pattern that persisted well into the early 1970's. In Robert Hilliard and Michael Keith's book *Waves of Rancor,* the authors argue that in divisive policy issues, especially in the case of the war in Vietnam, the media supported government actions; "there was little place on radio or on network television for other viewpoints." Additionally, right-wing station owners and program directors developed an informal "graylist" and publicly attacked leftist radio writers and announcer who were either fired or rendered virtually unemployable at commercial stations.[48]

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[47] NAEB 23.
[48] Robert M. Hilliard and Michael C. Keith, *Waves of Rancor: Tuning in the Radical Right* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1999), 25.

In the William and Mary Radio and Television Department's collection of radio-related books, the literature is similarly ambivalent about how deep radio should probe into contemporary political and social debates. Fears of government censorship appeared in S.B. Gould and S.A. Diamond's 1950 guide to radio announcing, which advised young reporters against airing "references to sex, details of brutal crimes, [and] religious and racial differences." The authors urged the prohibition of inflammatory material, and "for the protection of the station, news used on the air should be kept intact in a file for future examination if the need should arise."[49] Gould and Diamond's advice is understandable in light of the American Business Committee's 1950 publication of *Red Channels: The Report of Communist Influence in Radio and Television*, a libelous anticommunist directory that attacked broadcast performers, editors, and writers who opposed "racial discrimination, [advocated] civil rights, and [favored] improved relations between the United States and the Soviet Union" as patently un-American. Some radio stations forced their personnel to sign loyalty oaths to their country or face dismissal.[50] Merely airing controversial news stories risked being branded a Communist sympathizer.

Other books and pamphlets revealed similar uneasiness about the intersection between politics and news-gathering. In the Department's collection of 1967 radio convention speeches, news reporter Merrill Ash argued that a "good newsman" has "but one religion—it is the creed of accuracy and unswerving dedication to the ideal of complete news coverage of every newsworthy person and event in your city."[51] However, this directly contradicted KAGH radio station owner Julian Haas' admonition in the same book. He counseled news writers to spin a

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[49] S.B. Gould and S.A. Diamond, *Training the Local Announcer* (New York: Van Rees Press, 1950), 169.
[50] Howard Blue, *Words at War: World War II Era Radio Drama and the Postwar Broadcasting Industry Blacklist* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2002), 349-350.
[51] Merrill M. Ash, "News and Public Service," in *Radio Programming in Action: Realities and Opportunities*, ed. Sherril W Taylor (New York: Hastings House, 1967), 21.

potentially distressing news story by looking for the "light and bright side of a yarn." Haas told convention participants that at his station, "if necessary, we kill the story entirely" in order not to unduly shock the listening public. In fact, Haas opined, "a dog fight on the courthouse square is a heluva lot more news than a revolution in Central America."[52] Haas clearly illustrated the hesitancy with which broadcasters shouldered their newscasting responsibilities in an era of rabid pro-American dogmatism.

Similarly contradictory, a 1961 Virginia Association of Broadcasters (VAB) report claimed that "Virginia [commercial] broadcasters do not shy away from controversial subjects." Yet the "controversial subjects" the VAB cited were relatively inoffensive, and included water fluoridation, dog leash laws, and highway locations, with no mention of the current sociopolitical issues dividing the country.[53] VAB also argued that by airing "outstanding programs," such as one that dissected and refuted Radio Moscow's "obvious propaganda," Virginia could successfully combat Communism and anti-American sentiment.[54] That the Radio and Television Department owned broadcast literature that either hinted at or overtly endorsed the nation's anti-Communist policies must have influenced WCWM's programming philosophy. The lack of news programming in WCWM's early years from 1959 to 1961, as well as the preponderance of religious, classical, and background music during its programming may also allude to administrative unease about controversial educational content, as both faculty advisers Charles Woodliff and Jim Sawyer have noted.[55]

WCWM and Civic Education

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[52] Julian Haas, "News and Public Service," in Taylor 66.
[53] Virginia Association of Broadcasters, *Broadcasting in Virginia: A Report on the Radio and Television Industry in the State of Virginia* (Virginia: The Virginia Association of Broadcasters, June, 1961), 13.
[54] Virginia Association of Broadcasters 19.
[55] Charles Woodliff, e-mail message to author, November 1, 2006. See also, Jim Sawyer interview, conducted by the author, April 4, 2006, Williamsburg, Virginia.

After Jim Sawyer took over as faculty adviser in 1961, WCWM began following Robert Underwood's civic education model in earnest via classical music selections and syndicated news and public affairs programming. WCWM also offered continuing education courses for adults, news, public affairs programming, and discussions of current domestic and foreign issues.[56] The station depended on NAEB's tape network and other syndicated shows for outside programming, airing NBC news updates, *Dateline London*, and *Music from Idaho*.[57] Other non-music shows were student-produced efforts to provide a service to the community, and included faculty talks, student discussions, student government updates, and campus news spots of interest to William and Mary students.[58] In 1965 and 1966, Special Programs Director Al Louer hosted *Focus*, an interview program that covered issues concerning both the campus and the city of Williamsburg; Louer also featured public figures Colonial Williamsburg brought to town. In an interview, Louer recalled the goal of his show: "I guess what I was trying to do was to get more serious discussion…and take advantage of the resources that were in the Williamsburg area." The program offered students an opportunity to understand their surrounding environment, because otherwise "kids just didn't have a clue" about Colonial Williamsburg, the town, and the notable interviewees before *Focus'* creation.[59] This public affairs show was part of a larger mission, described in a 1967 WCWM press release that claimed that in order "to understand the complexity of society, the college station offers programs to acquaint its listeners with various aspects of culture."[60]

Noncommercial Radio and High-Culture

[56] Herman W. Land Associates, *The Hidden Medium; A Status Report on Educational Radio in the United States* (New York: Herman W. Land Associates, 1967), i-3.
[57] "WCWM Offers Variety to Campus FM Listeners," *The Flat Hat*, 29 September 1961, 2. See also "WCWM Presents," *The Flat Hat,* 11 March 1966, 4.
[58] Al Louer interview, conducted by the author, 29 March 2006, Williamsburg, Virginia.
[59] Louer interview.
[60] "WCWM Presents," *The Flat Hat*, 20 October 1967, 14.

How best to educate Americans about national cultural values was the dominant question facing 1950's and 1960's educational broadcasters. Many stations focused on the educated and cultured elite, playing classical music, literature and poetry readings, and other "sophisticated" programming. These high-culture proponents continued to program this material despite surveys that suggested that such content did not meet audiences' educational needs. Academics believed they knew what the public "needed" better than audiences themselves. Columbia University's Paul Essert upheld this view, arguing that "the university station should be a leader of good taste…A program director should not program exclusively to what the audience expressed as its favorite programs." Besides, he claimed, audience research is useless because "what the audience say they want is often different from their actual listening habits."[61] In other words, not only were audience members contradictory about what they wished to hear, they also needed an outside authority to educate them about what they *should* want to hear.

Educational broadcasters in particular felt that classical or "serious" music would act as an effective transmitter of culture. Gail Eveland wrote that nearly thirty-percent of all institutional radio's music programming was classical because it was "presumed to be of a serious nature and was given first consideration." Additionally, Eveland and many other radio educators assumed that classical music "appeal[led] to developed taste" and was therefore more stimulating than other "light" musical forms.[62] For example, the Virginia Association of Broadcasters' 1961 report pronounced that "despite the mass acceptance of poor music," many commercial Virginian stations attempted to elevate listener tastes by airing classical music. "Yes, Virginia," the report boasted, "there is good music in broadcasting."[63] This attitude as to what

[61] Paul L. Essert, "Adult Education by Radio," *Education on the Air* (1949): 187-198, quoted in Patricia Holp, "Format Public Radio: An Alternative for Educational Radio" (masters thesis, University of Akron, 1974).34.
[62] Eveland 26.
[63] Virginia Association of Broadcasters 16.

constituted educational music characterized commercial radio broadcasters' community outreach programs as well, which substituted classical musical appreciation programs for tangible public service.

Like many noncommercial FM stations, WCWM management assumed that Western music was inherently uplifting. As an entity maintained to "raise [Western] cultural standards," classical music formed an integral part of the station's educational campaign.[64] WCWM's first faculty adviser, Charles Woodliff, remembered that "the administration also wanted the radio station to be classically oriented. Elvis was not much of an option for us."[65] Former WCWM announcer Bob Blase echoed Woodliff, recalling that "the rock 'n' roll revolution…was nixed by faculty advisers [and the administration] as they were more concerned with an image of the school in the community than with the musical tastes of the students."[66] Former disc jockey Al Louer encountered similar expectations in the mid-1960's. The station connected classical and background music with academic rigor. Louer's classical music program was considered "something to study by. And I was encouraged not to talk very much. Not to read too much of the liner notes…but to just play the music because everybody was studying and it was nice to study to."[67]

Louer's comment revealed that WCWM's announcing policy downplayed excessive voice-breaks in order to facilitate greater listener engagement with the classical compositions, distancing WCWM from the bombastic, fast-paced style of commercial AM radio. One 1959 manual used by William and Mary radio and television instructors made this distinction clear. The guide explained that a classical or "good music" announcer was "not concerned with hit

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[64] Hayden 2.
[65] Woodliff November 1, 2006.
[66] Bob Blase, "'And Then There Was WCWM': A Short History," *WCWM Pin-Ups*, no. 2 (2006), http://www.wm.edu/so/wcwm/alumni/02/index2.html.
[67] Louer.

records" and was "seldom…concerned with developing a personal following."[68] Instead, classical music's educational properties were foregrounded, in contrast to the constant interplay of voice and song featured on many contemporary commercial rock stations. Good citizenship, these manuals implied, depended on highly cultured taste only to be found in classical programming.

Student Involvement in Noncommercial Radio

Although many noncommercial stations trained students to be career-oriented broadcast announcers, a deep-seated unease about the appropriate amount of student involvement in programming and operational decisions pervaded educational radio broadcasting. As early as 1948, educational broadcasters feared student influence would erode programming quality. Franklin Dunham of the U.S. Office of Education warned educators that although the "FM station becomes the natural laboratory" for "speech, drama, music, and many other departments whose students find familiarity with radio a vocational and cultural advantage," it cannot be overlooked that the "use of a station for laboratory experience should be regarded as a secondary purpose." Instead, noncommercial stations' primary objective should be to disseminate educational material to the adult listening area. The FCC in particular was "determined to assign all educational institution applicants to the FM channel." In exchange for this privilege, the agency expected educational FM radio licensees "to render an educational service to the schools and adults in the listening areas served."[69] Student staff educational needs, as well as a corresponding increase in student programming control, then, were of lesser importance than the interests of the wider community.

[68] Stuart W. Hyde, *Television and Radio Announcing* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1959), 168.
[69] Dunham 19.

The difficulty of balancing the competing demands of laboratory training, relevant programming, and public relations material was substantial. Although Woodliff and Sawyer repeatedly applauded the dedication of student volunteers, and are today very proud of the station staff, frequently William and Mary administrators and other radio educators drew an unfavorable connection between student control over institutional stations and amateurish, immature, and unprofessional on-air behavior. Woodliff remembered that "Dr. Mel Jones, Dean of the Faculty, [was worried] that some student might do something on the air to embarrass the College."[70] Faculty and administrative staff limited student autonomy over programming because the College feared damage to the station's high-culture reputation if students broadcast rock and roll or other "less sophisticated" material.[71] Similarly, in his masters thesis on the difficulties facing small radio stations, Gregory Schnirring pinpointed college administrators' anxiety when he warned that if schools failed to adequately supervise their stations, the resulting student misbehavior and mismanagement would create "most unfavorable publicity" for the institutions.[72] From the administration's perspective, acquiescing to student demands for more popular programming meant that neither WCWM nor the College could effectively educate a vulnerable public on critical issues civic and cultural education.

William and Mary's administration's distrust of student agency reflected prevailing national opinion. Indeed, the widespread student interest in programming pop music did not escape WCWM advisers or educational radio broadcasters in general. In their 1950 announcing guide, Diamond and Gould also assumed that the young announcer would, without supervision, "[go] on the air and [talk] about recordings...he obviously knows nothing about." The authors

[70] Woodliff November 1, 2006.
[71] Sawyer interview. See also "WCWM to Begin Broadcasting Oct. 3" *The Flat Hat*, 30 September 1960, 5.
[72] Gregory W. Schnirring, "Noncommercial Radio: History and Implications of Recent FCC Decisions" (Masters thesis, The University of South Dakota, 1979), 34.

advocated careful instruction so that impressionable disc jockeys would discard their commercial radio models and maintain a more appropriate "dignified, quiet [on air] delivery."[73] Nineteen-sixty station manager Marvin Bowman likewise recalled the general lack of student enthusiasm for classical music, when he explained that: "One well meaning announcer said the next section of an LP was op 56 (rather than opus). We laughed and cringed at the same time."[74]

The noncommercial broadcast industry often denigrated stations that allowed students an active programming role as less serious about their educational mission than more "professional" university stations.[75] As Robert Underwood warned, "any [educational] station [that] spends 90% of its air time [playing music] is not an **educational** station. It is a high-powered phonograph…It is not meeting its responsibilities; it is shirking them. It is not contributing one iota either to education or to broadcasting."[76] As late as 1969, the Public Radio Study accused student-operated stations of being "no more than 'electronic sandboxes' for the interested students…their immediate function is student-oriented." In explicitly comparing student operators to children playing with expensive toys, many educators and radio theorists located programming responsibilities firmly in the hands of a few academically trained advisers. The inevitable result of a student-controlled atmosphere, the Public Radio Study claimed, was that "the student usually [felt] that he should be working in a place as much like a commercial station as possible." Ironically, WCWM's partial status as a radio laboratory implied that students were training to work at commercial AM radio stations, with all the rapid-fire announcing, jingles, sound effects, minimal news and information segments that the form encouraged. Yet if students were allowed to make programming decisions, broadcasters feared that the informative and

[73] Gould 157.
[74] Marvin Bowman, email message to author, August 23, 2006.
[75] Martin 176.
[76] NAEB 22.

authoritative nature of educational radio would dissipate. In its place, they suspected, the "no-content" commercial model would govern, endangering the transmission of America's cultural heritage. Thus, until the late 1960's, the student volunteers who staffed WCWM filled directorship positions but had limited input in the overall direction of WCWM.

Noncommercial Radio and Conflicting Interests

Reacting to more generalized feelings of confusion and dissatisfaction within educational radio, in 1969 the NAEB published its Public Radio Study report, which found that many noncommercial stations had an "ill-defined desire to provide a 'quality service.'"[77] Furthermore, many stations were unable to pinpoint their audiences' concerns and needs as the station struggled to operate within a haze of competing institutional, staff, and faculty interests and educational philosophies. WCWM was no different, as Woodliff recalled. "The College had no carefully articulated educational goals for the station."[78] Born out of disparate agendas, WCWM struggled to find a clear path and direction. The station's conflicting initial goals to serve as a student broadcasting laboratory; a public relations tool for the school; and a purveyor of educational and informative programs impeded WCWM's attempts to clarify its role within the school and community. This situation was familiar to many other educational stations during the 1950's and 1960's. In *The Hidden Medium*, a NAEB-sponsored report on educational radio, Herman W. Land Associates wrote that educational radio had traditionally struggled against commercial radio, television, and "general apathy among the educational administrators who [controlled] much of its fortunes." Consequently, while innovative and individualistic, post-war educational radio lacked "cohesion as a medium, its purposes [were] varied and often confused,

[77] Public Radio Study, *Report* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Public Radio Study, 1969), 54.
[78] Woodliff November 1, 2006.

and it struggle[d] for the beginnings of recognition as a potentially valuable national resource."[79] Similarly, Donald Ray Martin observed that educational stations labored to accommodate three often incompatible interests: the faculty advisers lobbying to provide student laboratory training, the college administration hoping to create a public relations entity, and the student volunteers demanding more influence over the station they staffed.[80] NAEB's Public Radio Study also noted that "trying at once to operate a realistic laboratory for commercial broadcasting and to fill a void left by the commercial radio stations is difficult and frustrating."[81] Confronted by these competing interests, WCWM and other stations fought to maintain their sense of identity.

Most commonly, educational stations were organized under a department such as Speech, Theater or Radio and Television and "operate[d] as only an item within a departmental budget, on which higher decisions [were] rarely made. The managers of such stations tend[ed] to be either full-time teachers or students who ha[d] time-consuming other responsibilities."[82] Indeed, Woodliff and Sawyer both remarked about the heavy workload involved as faculty advisers. Woodliff wrote that in 1958, College president Alvin Duke Chandler "had become particularly interested in televised instruction and was anxious that William and Mary get involved. This meant simultaneous attention to both radio and television…we needed additional staff."[83] During Sawyer's tenure as radio and television adviser and instructor, he was at times "the only faculty member in broadcasting [and] spent a good bit of the evening and weekend time with students both at the station and with television activity."[84] Significantly, faculty advisers' feelings of over-commitment would resurface in the early 1970's as the principle factor in

[79] Herman Land Associates i-1.
[80] Donald Ray Martin, "A Study of Definitions and Attitudes Toward a Small College Non-commercial Educational FM Radio Station" (Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 1968), 5.
[81] Public Radio Study 60.
[82] Public Radio Study 59.
[83] Charles Woodliff, e-mail message to author, September 17, 2006.
[84] Jim Sawyer, e-mail message to author, October 15, 2006.

WCWM's gradual evolution into a student-run station. Administrative unwillingness to devote enough resources and faculty manpower to the station ironically benefited student volunteers who could thus shape programming around their interests.

Race, Gender, and Class at WCWM

Despite the heavy workload both the staff and advisers shouldered, alumni affectionately recalled Sawyer and Woodliff's dedication to fostering a sense of community within the station. For example, WCWM was Al Louer's "fraternity-sorority equivalent. And I think it was for many."[85] As Sawyer was "single during the early part of that decade, he would occasionally throw parties for his students and station volunteers."[86] WCWM alumni also agreed that Woodliff and Sawyer were willing to listen to student ideas about programming and broadcasting. Louer stated that Sawyer was "more like a friend…probably by the time senior year rolled around [we called him] Jim. There was a lot more formal relationship [with] the faculty…but you could argue with Jim. And disagree with him."[87] This exchange of ideas became increasingly important as the 1960's progressed and students and faculty alike challenged traditional social and cultural assumptions.

As a product of William and Mary's changing student composition and interests, WCWM necessarily reflected the larger social and political atmosphere circulating on campus and in the country. Faculty adviser Jim Sawyer stated that "it was quite a different campus then."[88] This was especially apparent within the context of racial tensions on campus. While a few African American students entered William and Mary in the early 1950's, Virginia's

[85] Louer.
[86] Sawyer e-mail.
[87] Louer.
[88] Sawyer e-mail.

massive resistance virtually eliminated black enrollment until 1959.[89] This hostility is present in the 1958 *The Colonial Echo* yearbook, the same year WCWM began construction. The yearbook featured a photograph entitled "Black and Blues," in which fraternity and sorority members are pictured in blackface and wearing minstrel outfits.[90] Al Louer recalled that "when the first black students came, I think during…'63 or '64, [they were] not going to [be allowed] to live on campus…There wasn't going to be a white person living with a black person in a dormitory. But that's not different from the morals and morays from other southern schools."[91] To protest William and Mary's treatment of African Americans, in 1967 Jim Sawyer and fellow Theater and Speech faculty member Louis E. Catron participated in a 77-strong faculty petition published in *The Flat Hat*, demanding that the "College…intensify whatever efforts it may be making to find and welcome qualified Negro residential students as soon as possible."[92] Additionally, some of the station's syndicated programming included public affairs series that examined racism around the world, such as the BBC's 1967 feature on prejudice in England.[93] However, while WCWM may have advocated ethnic tolerance, the staff remained virtually all-white until the 1990's.

While the station attempted to give students the opportunity to experience broadcasting and program to a wide variety of listeners, it still maintained broader society's assumptions about who should have access to the airwaves. Like many colleges in the 1960's, William and Mary enforced strict gendered policies on its student body. Station staff member Al Louer confirmed that the school exerted tremendous control over women. One policy was coined "Sexless

[89] Clenise Platt, "Éy: The African American Experience on Campus," William and Mary, www.warrenbuck.com/files/All_of_Us.pdf.
[90] *The Colonial Echo*, 1958, 232.
[91] Louer.
[92] "Urge College to Welcome Negroes," *The Flat Hat*, 13 January 1960, 5.
[93] "WCWM Presents," *The Flat Hat*, 10 November 1967, 12.

Mondays," in which "women had to be in by seven o'clock by Monday night…in lock down." Louer also remembered that "women couldn't wear pants on the street. Women were *not* allowed to smoke on the street, it was absolutely taboo." There was, however, "no control [over male students], so I mean, talk about sexist."[94]

Station alumni disagreed over the effect of such discrimination on the staff, however. Sue Billinglsey Mosher, who became the station's first female station manager in 1972, noted that the College did not end women's curfews until 1971. As women had to return to their dorms by 11 PM, it was difficult for female radio staff members to fully participate in WCWM activities and duties.[95] Al Louer denied that WCWM participated in the College's generalized sexism, however. "If the implication is that there was some kind of discrimination, there really wasn't…I think [WCWM] was as open to women as it was to men." However, he acknowledged that "if you go back and review the records, most of the leadership ended up being guys, but I think that was reflective of the general culture."[96] Nevertheless, as an extension of campus life, WCWM was far from egalitarian; it did not give women the same opportunity as men to make station programming and maintenance decisions. Louer's faculty adviser, Jim Sawyer, admitted that his own prejudice limited the extent of female students' involvement at WCWM: "The yearbook pictures will show that several co-ed[s] were active with the station, but few of them held significant staff positions. Later one of them should have been named to the lead position in the station if it weren't for my own sexist biases."[97] Sawyer continued that "during the early

[94] Louer.
[95] Sue Mosher interview, conducted by the author, 26 August 2006, Williamsburg, Virginia.
[96] Louer.
[97] Sawyer e-mail.

sixties WCWM was almost exclusively male…it was generally accepted that broadcast voices should be male."[98]

Similarly, gender bias and occupational discrimination barred women from most responsible positions in radio as a whole. Until the 1970's, women rarely heard their own voices on air. Even though radio studies confirmed that "there [was] no clear difference between the program preferences of men and women," broadcasters not only assumed that the best announcers were male, but continued to design gender-targeted content.[99] As William and Mary's 1950 radio instructional manual *Training the Local Announcer* writers Gould and Diamond claimed, ideal radio employees must fully inhabit the masculine, public realm in order to be successful broadcasters. The male announcer "must be well-read; he must have wide interests; he must have intellectual curiosity; he must be vitally interested in world affairs, politics, science, music, literature, sports, education, and every other activity that may contribute to the wholeness of his being."[100]

Many feminist scholars have analyzed the motivations behind such gender discrimination. Susan Douglas highlights the hegemonic structure that legitimized women's marginalization in the radio industry for decades. As early as the 1930's, she writes, audiences "preferred" male announcers over of female announcers because of cultural assumptions about gendered space and occupational activity: women, as homemakers, were deemed unfit to announce on matters beyond their domestic purview.[101] Rosalind Gill also traces the subtle ways modern radio stations justify their exclusion of women. Holding that women were

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[98] Sawyer e-mail.
[99] Bruce H. Westley and Philip P. Anast. *An Audience for Educational Radio.* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Television Laboratory, 1960), 35.
[100] Gould 4.
[101] Susan Douglas, *Listening in: Radio and the American Imagination* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 135.

fundamentally unsuited for radio, many male station managers and staff designated the male voice as "the norm against which other voices [were] judged for their appropriateness…a low, male voice [was] somehow naturally right for DJs."[102]

"Responding" to audience complaints that women announcers sounded affected, stations perpetuated gender discrimination by hiring men to give political talks, weather, and commercials; women were assigned to give literature readings and to lead philosophy or psychology discussions.[103] Since the radio industry assumed female employees were not competent to speak on national matters, and as Stuart Hyde's 1959 *Television and Radio Announcing* manual noted, "there [was] little opportunity for women announcers in most areas of news reporting," most women were "encouraged to work largely, if not exclusively, with the women's feature program material."[104] These "women's programs" provided information on domestic affairs and were often scheduled in the mornings, since, as Gould and Diamond explained, "women like to listen while doing their housework."[105] Since these shows were the province of female announcers, they were assumed to be inferior to public-oriented programming. Gould and Diamond advised, however, that "it is wise for the [male announcer] not to regard the [women's] show as a hit-or-miss affair that he has been forced to handle, but as a challenge to do a good job…He should always act as though he were enjoying the experience and getting many helpful hints out of the broadcast for his own home."[106] Even the National Association of Educational Broadcasters cloaked its sexism in progressive politics: while it commented that by 1967 institutional stations were airing information appealing to

[102] Rosalind Gill, "Justifying Injustice: Broadcasters' Accounts of Inequality in Radio" in *Women and Radio: Airing Differences*, ed. Caroline Mitchell (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 148.
[103] Douglas 135.
[104] Hyde 158.
[105] Gould 173.
[106] Gould 174.

underrepresented female audiences, shows targeting "women's issues" focused on consumerism, housing, nutrition, credit plans, urbanization, and birth control—subjects firmly anchored in female domestic space.[107] Because the "typical woman [wanted] a different set of answers from a given interviewee than a man," namely, descriptions of fashion, home décor, and culinary trends, broadcasters dismissed women announcers and audiences unfit to shape either commercial or educational radio.[108] Women, then, received less important positions, and station managers sometimes actively guarded against female increases in power and authority in radio.

In addition to privileging Anglo-American cultural heritage programs and promoting white male announcers over their underrepresented counterparts, noncommercial stations also monitored the announcers' on-air behavior to ensure that broadcasters maintained a subdued, homogenous sound they hoped would reinforce an image of professionalism, sophistication, and intelligence. While ostensibly the strict performance standards in speech, radio, and television courses replicated broadcasting policies the student would encounter in the commercial format, in actuality educational stations were very much at odds with their commercial counterparts. Student laboratories instead perpetuated noncommercial philosophies of high-culture dissemination and civic education.

While some students pushed for WCWM to incorporate a Top-40, high energy disc jockey approach, during the early- to mid-1960's this remained at odds with educational radio's image that privileged program content over announcing style. This uniformity went so far as to dictate the manner in which the announcer presented his or her program. Manual writers Gould and Diamond advised that one should lose regional speech characteristics because "it should be

[107] Herman W. Land Associates ii-14.
[108] Hyde 178.

impossible for the listener to tell from which section of the country you come."[109] WCWM alumnus Ron Willard remembered enrolling in a radio-related speech class that, despite the instructor's efforts, "did not completely deal with my 'Maine' accent."[110] Similarly, 1969 WCWM station manager Charlie Dent recalled auditioning for an announcing position at the station and almost failing because "since I was a kid from Pulaski County…I pronounced *Appalachia* in the Southwest Virginia vernacular."[111] By supervising students' on-air activities, management hoped to erase class- and regional-based accents in their announcers, thereby engaging in a nationalistic fantasy that erased cultural and geographic divides. They also distinguished the noncommercial format from its counterpart, the more bombastic and "low-culture" commercial radio station disc jockey style.

Popular Music and WCWM

However, by the mid to late 1960's, WCWM's gradual acceptance of popular music followed a broader educational radio trend, and noncommercial stations began to search for ways to appeal to a general audience. In the 1969 Public Radio Study, the authors acknowledged that educational stations had begun to transform from a "haven" from mass culture and sociopolitical issues to directly engaging in "the world around [them]."[112] The staid sound of the educational radio announcer was criticized not only by college students, but by educational broadcasting reformers, who accused these stations of perpetuating an "ivory tower" mentality. Operating in a "new age," these critics pushed for "new approaches and new demands" to remain relevant.[113]

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[109] Gould 39.
[110] Willard.
[111] Charlie Dent, "Down to and Up from the Underground." *WCWM Pin-Ups,* no. 3 (April/May 2006), http://www.wm.edu/so/wcwm/alumni/03/charlie_dent1.html.
[112] Public Radio Study 136-137.
[113] William G. Harley, "Future Orbit of Educational Radio" in National Association of Educational Broadcasters, *National Educational Radio: a Blueprint for the Future* (Washington: National Association of Educational Broadcasters, 1964), 7.

Jim Sawyer recognized that most students preferred more modern music than the predominantly classical fare WCWM had provided.[114] One alumnus claimed that it would have been previously inconceivable for students to program a rock and roll show during prime listening hours, yet by the mid-1960's, station manager Jesse Hawk, dubbed "the Rockin' Hawk," hosted one with "Jim Sawyer's blessing." The show, and its successor, *Cue*, was an attempt to boost campus listenership, and was part of the station's commitment to performing a service for the student community.[115] Yet this acceptance was not without debates. In 1965, a particularly dramatic on-air incident clearly portrayed the tension surrounding student taste and rock and roll. One afternoon Sawyer happened to turn on WCWM during Hawk's radio program and was confronted by the garage rock song "Louie Louie" blaring from his speakers. The song was already controversial for its perceived "vulgar" lyrics. Sawyer called Hawk and demanded he stop the song.[116] Hawk broadcasted the WCWM controversy live, asking listeners to call in to the station with their opinions on "Louie Louie's" obscene lyrics and Sawyer's mandate that Hawk follow more traditional notions of "quality" music. Although the situation exposed the cultural ideologies dividing the two men, Sawyer recalled that Hawk's argument forced him to reevaluate his previous assumption that popular music was inferior to classical or "serious" compositions. Afterwards, Sawyer claimed, he refrained from commenting on the rock music WCWM staff wished to play.[117] In accordance with Sawyer's—and the administration's—changing attitude over popular music, Al Louer explained that after Jesse Hawk's tenure, "there was no real control over what your personality on-air was to be like."[118] Hawk and others ushered in a generation of modern rock shows, and Charlie Dent recalled that these prime time

[114] Anonymous.
[115] Anonymous.
[116] Sawyer interview.
[117] Sawyer interview.
[118] Louer.

programs allowed hosts to "emulate the jocks from the great Top 40 stations: WIBG, WLS, [and] WABC."[119]

Sawyer and Woodliff, as well as later advisers, had the unenviable task of carefully balancing the demands imposed by the administration, student body, and student volunteers, with their own ambitions for the station. While later student activism may have precipitated WCWM's evolution into a student-run extra-curricular activity, a complex interplay of factors was largely responsible for this change. Faculty attention was divided between their responsibilities as instructors and advisers, a difficult position considering the amount of work involved in managing a radio station. At the same time, students began pressuring the administration for greater academic and social freedom. Some of these same activists also worked at WCWM and may have advocated a similar reform at the station. By the late 1960's and early 1970's, College officials' gradual retreat from controlling print and broadcast media content allowed students greater leeway for self-expression, and receding programming censorship may have encouraged more student participation in station policies. Additionally, many students now volunteering at WCWM became devoted to the new underground music broadcast on progressive FM stations in their hometowns.[120] Coming to WCWM, they expected that the station reflect not only Top 40 AM station music selections, but also these progressive sounds. The music these students advocated often reflected this trend. Simultaneously, educational broadcasters realized that in order to effectively reach a diverse public, their methods of information dissemination would have to be revised; often, the resulting form was a hybrid of entertainment and educational content that appealed to a wider segment of more socially conscious listeners. The creation of National Public Radio in 1970 with its combination of

[119] Dent.
[120] Mosher interview.

public affairs programming and cultural offerings provided a new model for educators to follow, a form that WCWM would soon emulate as well.[121]

[121] Ralph Engelman, *Public Radio and Television in America: A Political History* (Thousand Oaks, California, London and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1996), 89.

Chapter 2: WCWM in Transition: 1967-1977

By the mid-1960's student rights and responsibilities had become a flashpoint for debate on university campuses nationwide. The issue of *in loco parentis*, whereby the college faculty and staff supervised students in order to maintain moral and intellectual discipline, angered many students, who felt that such regulations denied the freedoms they deserved.[122] Institutions maintained that they upheld faculty and administrative authority in order to safeguard the "normal restrictions established by society for the good of the whole community," an aim that educational radio stations embraced as well.[123] The stations' power structure emulated the centralized university chain of command by appointing the faculty adviser as ultimate authority. Additionally, like their university sponsors, noncommercial radio argued that it provided its listeners with invaluable high-culture and civic instruction. Furthermore, as students successfully overturned *in loco parentis* campus policies, ensuring that their rights to "creative criticism and action" were protected, radio station staff simultaneously demanded more control over programming decisions. Thus, the ten years between 1967 and 1977 found stations like WCWM responding to changing conceptions of educational radio, its responsibility to its audience, and its relationship to wider cultural debates. Older views of centralized authority, high-culture programming formats, and propagandistic visions of civic education gave way to increasingly pluralist conceptions of public education. Student volunteers challenged the distanced position stations had adopted, instead advocating a community-driven utopian model of accessible, relevant, and consciousness-raising broadcasting. Significantly, these noncommercial stations also rejected high-culture educational theory, preferring to imitate either the entertainment-driven Top-40 AM rock stations or the late 1960's "underground" FM stations,

[122] Arthur H. Kiendl, Jr, "Academic Round Table: *In Loco Parentis*," *Journal of Higher Education,* (November 1963), 465.
[123] Kiendl 465.

which prized politically and socially progressive content. Although these stations revolutionized programming, their commitment to educating their listening community remained.

William and Mary, WCWM, and Student Autonomy: 1967 to 1969

While by the early 1970's students enjoyed more personal freedom as administrators were forced to scale-back overly repressive policies, as late as 1968 *in loco parentis* was still firmly entrenched. In this, William and Mary's administration deviated little from other universities. Charlie Dent, WCWM station manager from 1968 to 1969, recalled that William and Mary was reluctant to grant students increased autonomy. He remembered that during the summer of 1968, "when students were [,] of course, away," the College released "the 'Statement of Rights and Responsibilities,' a document from the College that was designed, basically, to codify *in loco parentis.* Most of us thought that the document gave all the 'rights' to the administration and all the 'responsibilities' to the students." In the same year, William and Mary invited Richard Nixon "to make a campaign stop at the College and to hold a 'conversation with students' in the Wren Building. It was revealed that the 'students' were recruited from other schools, and it was rumored that the 'conversation' was to become a TV commercial. Whatever the case, it was nothing more than a media event that incensed the campus."[124]

In this state of political unrest, WCWM struggled to keep abreast of both campus and national changes. Scholar Beth Bailey explains that as students across the country questioned traditional hierarchical distributions of power and authority, "university and high school students…understood their actions within a national framework, formed local branches of national organizations, and corresponded with their peers about the issues of the day."[125]

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[124] Charlie Dent, "Down to and Up from the Underground." *WCWM Pin-Ups,* no. 3 (April/May 2006), http://www.wm.edu/so/wcwm/alumni/03/charlie_dent1.html.
[125] Beth Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1999) 6.

WCWM's student staff also began to reevaluate their relationship to the station and campus community in a more populist light. Charlie Dent argued that WCWM's shift to a student-run station that favored politically-relevant news, public affairs, and progressive music programming "was more a function of the times and the culture than it was anything else."[126] Overcoming entrenched notions of radio broadcasting's role as civic educator and high-culture disseminator proved difficult, however. As a communications tool that could potentially reach millions of Americans without ready access to museums, libraries, opera houses, and other cultural institutions deemed integral to shaping Democratic minds, high-culture proponents argued that radio's civic importance was too great to sacrifice to student interests.

The disjunction between the way administrators treated WCWM and its fellow student organization *The Flat Hat* strongly illustrates this broadcasting ideology. By the mid-1960's, the paper had palpably benefited from challenges to *in loco parentis* policies, most visibly in March, 1967, when *The Flat Hat's* former censor, Professor Glenwood Clark, apologized for his role in suppressing controversial news.[127] In *The Flat Hat* article, the authors cast Clark as "an all powerful censor who was supposed to delete anything which was unfavorable to the administration." He "consider[ed] this to be the most odious activity he ever engaged in and continually found himself siding with the students as censorship conflicted with his ideals concerning freedom of the press." The administration, however, saw WCWM as a fundamentally different type of organization and continued to dictate station policy. Scholar Samuel Sauls explains this view while analyzing current college stations: "the campus newspaper is just that—a 'campus' outlet….It has no ongoing commitment to the local community….The campus radio station, however, is a federally licensed agent of the school and

[126] Charlie Dent, email message to author, December 18, 2005.
[127] Mike Chesson, "Old Flat Hat Censor, Clark Reveals Regrets, Memories," *The Flat Hat*, 10 March 1967, 15.

must meet minimum obligations so as not to jeopardize its continued authorization to operate."[128] Traditionalist faculty advisers argued, then, that the wide broadcasting power of the campus radio station exponentially increased its importance as a community instructional tool.

While Sauls argues that the college newspaper and the college radio station, for all their news-gathering commonalities, have essentially different roles in their community, WCWM staff must have nonetheless been frustrated by their limited influence over station policy. Nineteen sixty-nine station manager Mike Campana complained to *The Flat Hat* staff that the station's editorial power was constrained: "we're kind of hampered since we have to send out copies of an editorial to all concerned and give them the opportunity to reply" under the FCC fairness doctrine.[129] Constricted, then, by federal regulation and administrative policy, student radio staff increasingly felt that they should have more authority over a station that by the late 1960's they were operating virtually by themselves.

WCWM's Transition from Faculty- to Student-Controlled Station: 1969 to 1971

Although William and Mary's administration enforced faculty supervision over the station in the interests of educating the community, the fact that radio adviser involvement decreased by the late 1960's indicates the College's ambivalence about the true worth of the station. However unwilling it was to grant students greater programming freedom, the administration also under-funded the station, gave WCWM advisers unclear educational objectives, and overworked its paid staff. Consequently, just as student staff members asked for a greater stake in their station, faculty interest began to wane. By the late 1960's, newly married faculty adviser Jim Sawyer was spending less time at WCWM. His successors also had difficulty balancing the demands of their teaching positions with managing the station, and

[128] Samuel Sauls, *The Culture of American College Radio* (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 2000) 148.
[129] "Campana Picks Staff for WCWM Next Fall," *The Flat Hat*, 15 May 1969, 1.

Sawyer recalled that student control over programming and operations had become *de facto* by his departure in 1970.[130] Sue Billingsley Mosher, station manager from 1972 to 1973, claimed the station's transition from faculty to student authority was gradual, noting that the staff was not fully aware of the changes unfolding until faculty involvement was virtually non-existent.[131] Indeed, many transitional-era alumni did not recall ever meeting their faculty advisers, or even knowing of their existence. Rick Platt, a WCWM alumnus, claimed that the station was completely student-run by 1970. He was aware of a faculty adviser but "there was not much supervision." Like Dent, he credited the station's progression from faculty-run to student-run management as a product of student demands for more autonomy over their daily affairs.[132] Dent wrote that the college "culture was changing, and WCWM was…in a state of flux. Many of us questioned the traditional mission of the station."[133] The confusion over who was managing the station—the students or the faculty adviser—persisted until 1971 when the station left the Theater and Speech Department to join the Publications Council, a student government-funded body of student-led campus media organizations.

Populist Programming at WCWM

By 1969 and 1970, WCWM staff enjoyed expanded control over station maintenance and programming. Interestingly, while both students who advanced democratic programming policies and faculty broadcasters who propagated older high-culture format models believed in the utopian power of broadcasting to transform audience minds, each entity had very different goals. WCWM staff's vision of civic education distanced itself from faculty-proscribed nationalistic education models; student management during this period demanded programs raise

[130] James Sawyer interview, conducted by the author, April 4, 2006, Williamsburg, Virginia.
[131] Sue Mosher interview, conducted by the author, August 26, 2006, Williamsburg, Virginia.
[132] Rick Platt interview, conducted by the author, October 28, 2006, Williamsburg, Virginia.
[133] Dent, "Down to and Up from the Underground."

listeners' political consciousness. The station's format changes, then, were two-fold, encompassing a shift toward politically progressive campus and national news as well as an embrace of Top-40 popular rock and "underground" counterculture music programming. Charlie Dent clarified the station's position: although "popular music was always the thrust, [we had] a commitment to doing news; we were rivals with *The Flat Hat* in those days."[134] In claiming that listeners would "hear it happen" first on WCWM, the station identified itself as an indispensable tool in deciphering campus and national political events. By becoming aware of hegemonic forces controlling the student on campus and in American society, the radio audience had no less of a stake in national policies than under traditional high-culture educational models. The station responded to the changing times by slowly altering the top-down transmission of cultural standards to engage and educate students by playing pop music and broadcasting issues they cared about.

The increasingly progressive programming WCWM aired by the late 1960's may reflect the revitalization educational radio enjoyed as a consequence of Congress's implementation of the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 and the formation of National Public Radio (NPR). WCWM staff goals echoed NPR cofounder William Siemering's mission to promote "the populist ideals of extending knowledge and culture to as many people as possible, not unlike the free public library."[135] NPR would provide the national public with a "full range of the culture…of American society," and recognize and legitimize "the aspirations of ethnic and racial minorities."[136] Ralph Engelman writes that this goal was quite different from both that of the traditional educational station and that of the commercial station; NPR would distinguish itself

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[134] Dent December 18, 2005.
[135] Michael C. Keith, *Talking Radio: An Oral History of American Radio in the Television Age* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2000) 163.
[136] Ralph Engelman, *Public Radio and Television in America: A Political History* (Thousand Oaks, California, London and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1996) 91.

"from both an outdated Victorian concept of cultural uplift and a market-driven system directed toward the lowest common denominator."[137] Siemering argued that "we were no longer content to define public radio as simply noncommercial, as a passive transmitter of culture, but rather as something to be engaged with the most critical issues of contemporary life; something to strengthen democracy itself."[138]

While the Public Broadcasting Act was originally intended to support only public television stations, scholar Gregory Schnirring wrote that Congress hoped to "bring educational television and radio programs to their highest potential."[139] However, worried that impoverished educational radio stations would be excluded from federal aid, the National Association of Educational Broadcasters (NAEB) published *The Hidden Medium*, a report on the status and potential of institutional radio that eventually convinced Congress to include noncommercial radio in its legislation.[140] In sponsoring "public" broadcasting, legislators broadened the mission of noncommercial radio and television stations from serving as low-power student laboratories or university public relations tools into a unified educational network that ensured station autonomy and freedom of expression while developing "programs of high quality from diverse sources" and a system of live station interconnection.[141] As a result of Samuel Holt's 1969 Public Radio Study *Report*, which, like *The Hidden Medium*, documented noncommercial radio's potential for growth despite general stagnation, the overarching Corporation for Public Broadcasting established the Radio Advisory Council and NPR in 1970 to ensure the growth and success of

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[137] Engelman 89.
[138] Keith, *Talking Radio*, 164.
[139] Gregory W. Schnirring, "Noncommercial Radio: History and Implications of Recent FCC Decisions" (Masters thesis, The University of South Dakota, 1979), 25.
[140] Engelman 87-88.
[141] Chester Giraud, Garnet R. Garrison, and Edgar W. Willis, *Television and Radio* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1977) 240; quoted in Patricia Holp, "Format Public Radio: An Alternative for Educational Radio" (Masters thesis, University of Akron, 1974) 43.

public radio.[142] NPR-affiliates that broadcast 18 hours a day year-round, had a full-time salaried staff of at least five people, transmitted at 3,000 watts, and produced programming for local and national audiences could join the first nationally interconnected radio network in America.[143]

While WCWM did not have a large enough budget or staff to apply for NPR affiliation, it nonetheless benefited from the Public Broadcasting Act. A fresh theory of educational efficacy that stressed participatory democracy galvanized station staff, many of whom already subscribed to wider social and political activism. Like NPR and other public stations, WCWM provided both self-produced and nationally-oriented news programming, comprising American College Radio Network, ABC Information Radio, UPI, campus news, and special features including shows on the environment, recycling, and musician interviews. Smaller public stations like WCWM began to reevaluate the services they provided their audience, believing, as the National Association of Educational Broadcasters stated in 1971, that they had a "responsibility to create new relationships between the individual and the society that allows them to grow together."[144]

Under the successive leadership of managers such as Bob Stanners (1971), Steve Abramson (1971), and Bob Bacher (1972), the station became directly involved in the political and social discussions of the day. Believing that students had a right to know how global events directly affected them, WCWM regularly covered the Vietnam War, the counterculture, and the draft. This was a dramatic shift from the often dry public affairs programs traditionalist noncommercial broadcasters promoted as civic education; now student-led educational stations advocated critical inquiry into the motives of governmental actions.[145] For example, Bob

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[142] Engelman 89.
[143] Schnirring 29.
[144] National Association of Educational Broadcasters, "Educational Broadcasting and Public Responsibility," in *Report to the NAEB* (NAEB: 1971); quoted in Holp 49.
[145] Frank Bacskay, phone interview with author, July 15, 2006. See also "WCWM Presents," *The Flat Hat*, 17 February 1967, 10. See also "WCWM Presents," *The Flat Hat*, 24 February, 1967, 6. See also "WCWM Presents," *The Flat Hat*, 3 March 1967, 10.

Stanners, who was briefly station manager in the fall of 1971, absorbed himself and the station in campus politics in order to make the station more appealing and relevant to students. He first cemented WCWM's refusal to shy away from covering controversial programs and events by encouraging the station to join a "peace network organized by John and Yoko Lennon," and continued to reform WCWM's schedule in favor of popular Top-40 and progressive music programming.[146] Stanners' commitment to improving WCWM's programming quality reflected his devotion to the public interest. It is not surprising, then, that he renounced his position as manager a few months later in order to devote more time to student affairs. Running for Student Assembly president in 1971, Stanners claimed that he would "do everything possible to put social regulations, the student activities fee and every other aspect of student life on this campus in the hands of the students."[147]

WCWM's efforts to alert its listeners to events occurring around them continued with the aid of many other directors and volunteers. By March 1971 WCWM had aired an array of news broadcasts analyzing local and national political flashpoints: a station advertisement featured a dour Nixon caricature giving a lugubrious peace sign, and the text announced that the station would report on the College's Student Assembly election results; a speech given by U.S. Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas; events at the National Judiciary Conference; and President Nixon's recent ill-received visit to William and Mary. Later that month, station staff, some of whom had been present at the event, also covered the College's student-organized anti-Vietnam War conference, Peace and Justice Day. Attendees asked for immediate troop withdrawal from Vietnam and listened to speeches by featured guest Allen Ginsberg and other

[146] "Stanners WCWM Chief," *The Flat Hat*, 3 April 1970, 5.
[147] Charlie Gambler, "Stanners Declares for SA President," *The Flat Hat*, 26 February 1971, 4.

political and literary notables.[148] While alumni remarked that the staff was divided between politically leftist and conservative students, the station still engaged in the politics of the day by broadcasting public affairs programming of interest to the student body.

The William and Mary administration finally acknowledged student control of the station in 1971, when WCWM officially broke with the Theater and Speech Department and joined the Publications Council.[149] The Council, composed of student publications and a faculty or administrative liaison, restructured the budgeting and organizational structure of the station; the student assembly and the College's Board of Visitors now financed its operation. Additionally, as the station manager was no longer selected by a faculty adviser, the Publications Council chose candidates through an application and interview process.[150]

Feminism and the Role of Women at WCWM

The move to an explicitly student-focused publications board led to an even more radical structural change within the station. The more or less objective and removed directorship selection process, the preponderance of less traditionalist student voting members, and the increasing awareness of women's equality may have precipitated a major leadership reversal: in 1972 Sue Billingsley Mosher became the first female station manager of WCWM.[151] That the station and the College in general had begun to challenge the long-held assumption that men were most qualified to maintain a radio station helped Mosher and other female staffers gain access to WCWM's directorship positions.

Mosher recalled that in 1971, during her sophomore year, the College administration ended women's curfews; previously the early and restrictive hours had limited the amount of

[148] "WCWM Radio," *The Flat Hat*, 9 March 1971, 2. See also Bill Sizemore, "Counter Conference Draws Exuberant Crowd of 3000," *The Flat Hat*, 12 March, 1971, 1.
[149] Gail Long, "Radio Station Requests Funds for Transmitter," *The Flat Hat,* 15 October, 1971, 1.
[150] Scott Donaldson, letter to Publication Council, February 4, 1972, 4.
[151] Sue Billingsley Mosher, letter to WCWM staff, 29 July 1972.

time she and other female staffers could spend maintaining the station. The abolition of these curfews answered the demands of Mosher and her peers, who had "[come] of age during the leading edge of egalitarian spirit and the edge of the second wave of feminism." Their matriculation into William and Mary in 1969 corresponded with the end of the Civil Rights Movement and the beginning of 1970's feminism; Mosher recalled that "the Equal Rights movement began and the National Organization for Women was founded." Women had "open eyes toward any discrimination in our midst. Discrimination against color was wrong, and so was sexism. We were in a changing political and social climate. Why would the administration lock up women and not men on campus?"[152] Although for different reasons, the administration also came to question these practices. Beth Bailey argues that across the country many administrators "supported liberalization of [*in loco parentis*] rules as a way to develop responsibility…among students" while others "became increasingly aware that *in loco parentis* was a potential legal nightmare, with the limits of the universities' responsibility and liability undefined."[153]

Feminism was not completely accepted at the station or on campus, however. Prior to Mosher's election, another female staff member, Cary Hoagland, remembers that the only women allowed to be out past 11 P.M. were those taking computer science courses, who had to monitor incoming computer data at late hours in their computer labs. Hoagland, incidentally, was the winner of a 1971 WCWM Dream Date contest in which DJ Marty Grogan, known as "The Grog," judged the sexual attractiveness of a female caller's voice; the winner won a date with the DJ and a ride on the WCWM Homecoming Float.[154]

Progressive Music at WCWM

[152] Sue Billinglsey Mosher interview, conducted by the author, August 26, 2006, Williamsburg, Virginia.
[153] Bailey 8.
[154] Cary Hoagland interview, conducted by the author, July 2006, Takoma Park, Maryland.

For WCWM, music was a political and utopian force that was integral to its educational mission. Influenced by alternative media such as FM underground radio stations and the counterculture, beginning in late 1960's WCWM began to recast itself as a local outlet for the students' favorite hometown pop stations as well as the only place they could hear esoteric hippie records. This transition began in 1968, when eventual station leaders Mike Campana and Steve Abramson rethought the relevance of the few mainstream rock and roll shows the station promoted. The outcome was a dynamic mix of commercial AM and progressive rock. Charlie Dent recalled that "Mike [Campana] did a show called 'Up From the Underground,' which was a precursor to what, I would imagine, became the AOR [album-oriented rock] format of WCWM in the '70's."[155] The trend continued, and by March 1970, music director Joyce Largen wrote to record distributors describing WCWM as a mixture of "Top 40" and "underground" music. In keeping with the countercultural tone of the letter, she also claimed that WCWM's noncommercial, low-budget status was the "one big reason why we're so popular."[156]

Unlike commercial underground radio, which broadcast mostly music and little public service or news programming, the student staff at WCWM believed they served a different purpose. Like other student-run noncommercial stations, WCWM began experimenting with playing large blocks of progressive music and public affairs programming relevant to their public.[157] Beginning in 1972, the station dubbed itself "Radio Free Williamsburg," a motto that, as 1973 to 1974 station manager Bob Barnett felt "embodies…a lot about us; location, frequency, non-commercial status, flexible programming, volunteer staffing, sort of underground music."[158] Scholar Patricia Holp wrote that these stations offered "a format similar to

[155] Dent December 18, 2005.
[156] Joyce Largen, letter to record companies, 17 March 1971.
[157] Holp 72.
[158] Bob Barnett, letter to WCWM staff, August 11, 1973.

commercial radio, and therefore would be familiar and acceptable to the audience, yet it would offer a wealth of information not found on the commercial station" such as educational newscasts and public service announcements edited seamlessly into the overall program.[159] The staff took this mission very seriously. One staff member wrote to new station manager Sue Billingsley Mosher in 1972 that "more than ever I realize the gravity of WCWM's situation. We need to get very serious very fast. No more of this Fun Radio," an allusion to manager Steve "Swing Thing" Abramson's easy-going Top-40 styled radio format.[160]

Key to a successful station, then, was the dedication and unity of the staff. Sue Billingsley Mosher remembered that "for the committed student staff, radio was mostly self-taught….It was an effort to be knowledgeable about music; you had to trade albums and tapes" as well as rely on the station's influx of new records to be informed of the current musical trends. She added that the station staff "heard other [progressive] stations and were influenced by them and emulated their sound. Norfolk and other areas shared similar music interests."[161] Terri Nickel, active at WCWM between 1974 and 1978, recalled that one director "knew EVERYTHING [about music]. She kept an index card box as her master library on every piece of music with keywords so she could cross-reference and do interesting segues. The personal computer had not yet been invented, so we didn't have the luxury of databases!"[162]

While across the country noncommercial FM stations still lagged behind commercial radio stations in sales and audience interest, WCWM's unique market made it possible for the station to compete with area commercial stations after it increased its frequency to 50-watts, now

[159] Holp 71.
[160] Horace, letter to Sue Billingsley Mosher, July 26, 1972.
[161] Mosher interview.
[162] Terri Nickel, email message to author, January 7, 2006.

covering a larger area than its previous 10-watts ever could.[163] In Sue Mosher's 1972 general staff letter, she emphasized the importance of the station's new place within a wider community. Professionalism was key: while the previous freeform format allowed DJs tremendous playlist leeway, "no listener ever knows what he is going to get when he tunes us in. This was not such as upsetting matter when WCWM was limited to the college audience, [but the] potential audience is now something closer to 10 times what it was before. This brings us into actual competition with other radio stations (WGH, WOWI, WNOR-FM, WTVR-FM, WMBG, etc.)."[164] With an expanded broadcasting range, "WCWM can no longer afford to be 'do your thing radio'"; while still allowing disc jockeys creative expression, the station enacted a more unified "popular progressive" format that would appeal to a larger audience.[165]

By the early 1970's WCWM directors gave much attention to crafting a unified aural and visual station identity. John Falcone, a director, drafted an early mission statement in 1973, claiming that "WCWM cannot strictly be called a Top-40 station or a Progressive station. WCWM considers itself more advanced than both." He criticized commercial progressive stations for providing a "maximum" amount of music with a "minimum" of news. While from the late 1960's into the early 1970's underground FM stations had prided themselves in airing socially conscious music and news, some attacked these counterculture efforts as "frivolous, self-serving, and wanting" in substance.[166] WCWM, in contrast, attempted to curb self-indulgent or egotistical programming, because the station "appeal[ed] to a different type of audience": the surrounding community rather than a minority of counterculture enthusiasts. Falcone continued that "WCWM airs what it considers to be a reasonable amount of news, enough to be

[163] Sauls 194.
[164] Mosher letter 1.
[165] Mosher letter 1, 3.
[166] Michael C. Keith, *Voices in the Purple Haze: Underground Radio and the Sixties* (Westport, Connecticut and London: Praeger, 1997) 89.

informative," and to provide a public service "as it relates to the campus and the surrounding community."[167] While WCWM combined progressive and mainstream music, Falcone claimed that "WCWM feels that broadcasting one specific type of music would limit the station's range of appeal." Instead, it aimed to provide "music covering a broad base" as an "alternative to the ubiquitous top 40 stations."[168]

While station directors defined themselves against commercial stations that catered to Top-40 and progressive audiences, the similarities between the two entities nonetheless remained. Commercial progressive station WPLO's manager Ed Shane advised in 1969 that "with a subdued, non-announcerish delivery, [a disc jockey] can relate as a real human being and get across more than all the catch phrases on the rest of the dial combined."[169] Likewise, Falcone and other early 1970's directors encouraged WCWM DJs to "speak informally on the air, as though [they] were personally conversing face-to-face with his listener."[170] Bob Barnett wrote in 1973 that WCWM DJs were just as talented as commercial station announcers and were "not hype at all, on the contrary, tho, we're often boring."[171] Former station manager Sue Billingsley Mosher also revealed the commonality between many WCWM staff members and the countercultural attitude of commercial FM rock stations in her 1974 senior honors thesis, "The Meaning of Rock for Society": "in general rock culture promotes freedom of expression, experiential intensity, and a *carpe diem* joy of living, in other words, an individuality in life. At the same time it stresses community and environment, saying that all men are bound together by their commonality of existence."[172]

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[167] John Falcone, letter to Bob Barnett, summer 1973.
[168] Falcone.
[169] Ed Shane, quoted in Keith, *Voices in the Purple Haze,* 89.
[170] Falcone.
[171] Barnett.
[172] Sue Billingsley Mosher, "The Meaning of Rock for Society," (Senior honors thesis, College of William and Mary, 1974): 3-4.

Essential to WCWM's place on campus was its devotion to the format Mosher described as "freeform radio," or the absence of playlist restrictions in the pursuit of staff and listener musical education. The staff believed that "radio could influence people's minds." Rather than limiting the DJs to playing a single format such as Top-40, country, or rhythm and blues, the station encouraged a "more diverse sound" because WCWM "staff had its ears and minds open against anything constituting closed mindedness."[173] Student staff experimented with "musical collages," and used production studios to craft political commentaries, station identifications, and radio dramas. Playing a mix of obscure and popular music, Mosher claimed that "everyone at the station wanted to be artists. If no one appreciated WCWM's efforts, that was okay [with the staff]."[174] Commercial underground radio participant Julius Lester similarly described freeform radio as a "place where the program producer is free to do whatever he wants….The airwaves are the empty canvas, the producer is the artist, and the sound is the paint."[175] The broad range of music aired on WCWM is indicated by disc jockey Allen Hemphill's playlists from February 1973, which contained popular acts Little Feat, Steely Dan, and Moby Grape, as well as folk and blues artists Leo Kottke, David Bromberg, Fred Neil, and Big Bill Broonzy.[176]

WCWM, while not as radical as some progressive noncommercial stations, still loosely followed a freeform policy that emphasized "avant-garde music, both popular and serious, and community news and information." Additionally, "though it includes discussions, lectures and special services, the station's broadcast day is regarded as one continuous program" of freeform music.[177] Indeed, the station often equated "progressive" with "educational" music, excluding

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[173] Mosher interview.
[174] Mosher interview.
[175] Julius Lester, forward to *Playing in the FM Band* by Steve Post (New York: Viking, 1974), xiii; quoted in Keith, *Voices in the Purple Haze,* 52.
[176] Allen Hemphill playlist, 26 February 1973. See also Allen Hemphill playlist, undated from 1973.
[177] Public Radio Study, *Report* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Public Radio Study, 1969) 139-140.

other musical tastes and announcing styles. Sue Mosher wrote to her staff as early as 1972 that there would be "no more top 40 schlock, double-talking into the mike [sic] to fit in 150 words in 10 seconds over an intro or extro that nobody wants to miss." She also rejected the "heavy" underground voice: "No more soft cooing and useless information. From now on WCWM dj's are to PLAY IT STRAIGHT."[178] In other words, "it is essential that every DJ no longer consider the primary audience of his show to be himself." Additionally, the management crafted its educational policy by encouraging disc jockeys to mix unfamiliar music with the familiar. The audience, the station claimed, would remain loyal if the announcers "play something familiar and good…they'll stay tuned…to see what you'll do." If the disc jockey succumbs to the self-indulgent underground radio format, "they won't stay tuned if they've got to listen to 3 hours of Jerry Garcia."[179]

Dave Oxenford, station manager from 1975 to 1976, recalled that WCWM made an effort to keep progressive programming accessible to students. Oxenford stated that WCWM followed a "progressive ethos," which was to "provide something different" than what the mainstream commercial stations aired. Oxenford pressed his staff to make people "listen in a different way" and to "provoke people to think." Oxenford had very specific goals for the station to follow, and hoped WCWM would become a strong, informative, and professional-sounding station. In keeping with WCWM's effort to engage the campus with music and news relevant to its experiences, during the mid-1970's the station published programming guides, organized concerts, and printed *Megacycles*, an alternative literary and music magazine that covered WCWM events as well as other music-related topics. Oxenford recalled that the station's

[178] Mosher letter 1.
[179] Mosher letter 2.

reputation was such that "the campus listened when it wanted information."[180] In addition, its news department, headed by Kevin Christiano, increased the amount and quality of information the station aired. WCWM not only covered campus events and political debates, but broadcast the 1976 Jimmy Carter-Gerald Ford presidential debate live from Phi Beta Kappa Hall.[181]

Exclusivity at WCWM: Maintenance of an Outsider Status

Many considered their time at the station an extension of their social life, and relished the close-knit relationship that a common musical philosophy and long hours working at the station had fostered. Mary Cottrill claimed that the station felt like a community because it was "a hangout in between classes…it was kind of in the middle of New Campus…you could always run into the station,…talk to some people and run off to the next thing."[182] WCWM also had an active social chair that organized staff events such as the "Cheap Wine" and "Dress as a Song" parties, and published monthly staff bulletins to keep announcers abreast of station events and policies.[183] Directors also encouraged a community feeling among their staff. In her 1972 letter to staff, Mosher announced that the ideal disc jockey was a "staff member of WCWM before [he or she] is a dj…There is no such thing…as a WCWMer who can say, 'Oh, I just do a show there.'"[184]

While many considered WCWM their own fraternity, with disc jockeys socializing together at parties, delis, and after hours at the station, to those outside the "inner circle," the station could appear elitist. Critics said staff engaged in a clique-mentality that did little to broaden campus and community appeal. Bob Thompson, active at the station between 1974 and

[180] Dave Oxenford interview, conducted by the author, July 6, 2006, Washington D.C.
[181] Dave Oxenford, "WCWM: First with the News," *WCWM Pin-Ups,* no. 3 (April/May 2006), http://www.wm.edu/so/wcwm/alumni/03/dave_oxenford.html.
[182] Mary Cottrill interview, conducted by the author, April 5 2006, Williamsburg, Virginia.
[183] Oxenford interview, and Cottrill, and *WCWM News*, Summer 1972 or 1973, and *The Bent Wave*, Spring 1977.
[184] Mosher letter 3.

1975, recalled that WCWM's programming was comprised of "obscure tracks from obscure artists and the least melodic the better….[Shows were] driven by…whatever the disc jockey was [interested in]….It just struck me that there was a huge disdain for anything that was commercially successful or popular or listenable."[185] Thompson's 1974 to 1975 *Quiz Kid* show, a call-in game show that included Top-40 musical interludes, was the antithesis of WCWM's progressive image, and Thompson recalled that it was sometimes difficult for the staff to reconcile their different tastes with their desire for the station to be noticed on campus. He stated that his popular show "helped a little bit" in increasing station visibility, "although I think the station management probably would see all the people listening to my show and go, 'you know, the people that are listening to Bob's show are not exactly getting a sense of what WCWM is all about.'"[186] In fact, while Thompson was acquiring a campus-wide listener base, the station was exerting an effort to "get rid of the Top-40 experience, break the habit [of imitating commercial AM disc jockeys], tone down the AM traits. [The station] needed to have a cohesive sound; a 'Sound Experience.'"[187]

Although the station management wanted WCWM to be popular among students and the surrounding Williamsburg, the staff was uneasy about sacrificing its core identity as a progressive music station. For example, 1970's alumnus Bob Evans recalled that one of the reasons the station was album-oriented was because album cuts and "deep tracks" had become increasingly identified with progressive culture. "To be honest," he claimed, "no one would *want* to play 45's," which were redolent of the commercial radio ethos. Because WCWM did

[185] Robert Thompson interview, conducted by the author, March 20 2006, Williamsburg, Virginia.
[186] Thompson.
[187] Oxenford interview.

not play the current singles popular on mainstream stations, Evans remarked that "a lot of kids wouldn't listen to the station because it wouldn't play what they wanted to hear."[188]

As students solidified their control over WCWM, it became increasingly clear that despite the change in management ideas about what constituted quality programming persisted. As faculty supervision formally ended with WCWM's inclusion in the Publication Council, long-held notions on what constituted acceptable programming--classical music, literature readings, and career advice--were superceded by an acceptance of participatory democracy in which students had an opportunity to decide programming. Without guidance from academically-trained faculty advisers, traditional noncommercial models faded from sight, and students listening to their hometown radio stations emulated these formats in shaping their programming philosophy. The educational purpose of WCWM, for perhaps the first time, was challenged, with all staff involved in WCWM's renewed efforts to inform its audience. As the station control was relinquished to the students, however, the early 1970's era of experimentation and growth gave way to a more standardized programming policy that at times restricted the station's sound and creative freedom. The staff linked Top-40 music to political and social conformity, and students who rejected this format distanced WCWM from mainstream music and its connotations of complacency. By programming less popular music such as art rock, blues, country, folk, and world music, disc jockeys argued they could "educate" their public about cultural forms to which it had rarely been exposed.

By the end of the 1970's, however, the increasingly commercialized public radio models such as National Public Radio no longer resonated with station staff as viable formats, and WCWM and college radio stations in general became increasingly introspective and student disc jockey-oriented. The disc jockey now assumed a position of cultural authority once reserved for

[188] Bob Evans interview, conducted by the author, January 2007, Williamsburg, Virginia.

WCWM's faculty adviser: the staff's personal enjoyment and musical exploration replaced belief in radio's transformative powers. Did WCWM have a responsibility to educate its community through little-heard music and public affairs programming or to respond to campus tastes, even if that entailed programming mainstream and therefore "poor" quality music? These questions persisted during the next phase of WCWM's evolution.

Chapter 3: Musical Elitism

The concept of educational radio radically changed at WCWM and other college stations between 1977 and the mid-1980's. As WCWM aged, its programming philosophy dramatically altered the station's sense of purpose on campus. By the mid-1980's WCWM had abandoned the NPR community-focused format of the 1970's in favor of a predominantly alternative rock-centered schedule. Advocating radio as an avenue for personal creative expression, WCWM disc jockeys cultivated an image of musical authority and "coolness." Therefore, educating the listener became incidental to the larger vision of constructing WCWM as Williamsburg's alternative music scene as well as an extension of the College Radio Movement, a decade-long phenomenon during which record labels mined university rock stations for chart-topping new artists. However, while WCWM touted itself as antithetical to mainstream commercial radio, ironically its reliance on a coherent "alternative" sound edged it and other noncommercial stations like it closer to a commercial radio model than ever before. As commercial radio increasingly determined programming via audience polls and demographic targeting, the breadth of musical stylings featured on each station narrowed into specific genre categories. Mirroring this change, WCWM gradually abandoned the free-form, unpredictable format of its early 1970's period to conform to a more standardized vision of an alternative station. While audiences could still listen to bluegrass, rhythm and blues, and classical music alongside the newest in progressive college rock, these became compartmentalized as single genre slots on the station's programming schedule.

As WCWM became increasingly insular it was constantly forced to defend its purpose as beneficial to its listeners accustomed to an older form of noncommercial and commercial radio. While the public primarily listened to commercial Top-40 and NPR-styled public radio, by 1984

WCWM had consciously rejected the latter and lost interest in the former. Non-station staff felt that college radio should air music that appealed to most students, whereas disc jockeys argued that WCWM should play what staff deemed appropriate for audience consumption. The reasoning behind this assertion, however, changed between the late 1970's and the present. Between 1977 and 1984, WCWM cast itself as acceptable to all tastes, while after 1984 the station distanced itself from mainstream music and became an unapologetic alternative to what WCWM saw as repetitive and materialistic commercial radio. Initially, disc jockeys claimed that the station broadcast diverse and rare music as an educational service. By the mid-1980's, however, the station argued that airing obscure and non-major label music would convert listeners into progressive music enthusiasts.

Although WCWM presented a unified front in defending itself against outside criticism, debate between management and student volunteers also explored how "alternative" or "educational" the station should be. Staff discussed whether WCWM should risk alienating listeners in its pursuit to edify an unwilling or apathetic audience or whether it should emulate commercial stations and potentially suppress disc jockey creativity and musical interests by appealing to popular taste. These questions were not confined to WCWM, however; other college stations struggled to balance their desire to air underplayed artists with their Federal Communications Commission (FCC) mandate to appeal to listener needs.

WCWM and other college stations struggled to maintain its new identity against the FCC, the administration, and even other student organizations. Samuel Sauls, whose book *The Culture of American College Radio* offers information and advice for station managers, posits that while "some contend that college radio can be educational (for the listener) by programming 'diverse' and different music as compared to commercial stations," the FCC nevertheless requires that

college stations serve their community, "thus, giving the audience what it wants, and not necessarily what the students working at the station want to play or hear, clearly becomes a factor."[189] He also admits that college stations are often in the difficult situation of having to "please the entities that fund them," in WCWM's case, the student body. Perhaps pessimistically Sauls writes that "the question of loyalty, campus politics, playing favorites, and servicing numerous groups all come into play, helping to secure, increase, or diminish station support," especially when these groups have little understanding of the limited resources stations have at their disposal to create programming."[190] WCWM, then, by the 1980's faced a dilemma: was it enough to say that music alone satisfied an educational need? Or, if the station was operating as an entertainment provider, did the station have a responsibility to play mainstream music the students who more or less funded the station wished to hear?

It is especially interesting that in these debates the question of educational legitimacy no longer focused on WCWM's ability to provide quality public service announcements, news features, or public affairs programs, but rather on its music programming. As WCWM's 1958 charter originally mandated that the station broadcast educational and informative material to the campus and surrounding community, WCWM could fulfill its educational mandate by programming such service-related content.[191] In fact, until the late 1990's, the station featured a weekly news show, as well as public affairs program that invited campus leaders to discuss College politics. Even if WCWM played unpopular music, as long as it continued to provide audiences campus, community, and national news, could students really challenge its place as an informative non-commercial station? However, by the early 1980's, the station explicitly

[189] Samuel J. Sauls, *The Culture of American College Radio* (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 2000) 62, 37.
[190] Sauls 121.
[191] Alvin Duke Chandler, "WCWM Charter," 30 September 1958, 5. Swem Library, Williamsburg, Virginia.

defined itself in terms of its alternative music programming, and these non-music programs received much less attention in WCWM's programming guides, fliers, and press features. Significantly, the station's interest in programming predominantly alternative music might have been influenced by the emergence of strict music genres. Stations now conformed to specific genre niches such as country, rhythm and blues, oldies, and in WCWM's case, college rock. While the station defended itself as a purveyor of "alternative" music that educated its listeners, when seen in the context of broader radio movements, WCWM inhabited a definable industry niche. Regardless of WCWM's status as a noncommercial radio station, staff now saw the station as a provider of entertainment, albeit it in a somehow more privileged, higher quality form than the mainstream fare commercial radio contemporaries broadcasted.

Additionally, as the 1980's progressed, fewer students joined the station as a step toward pursuing careers in radio broadcasting. This interest in broadcasting as a career had encouraged older disc jockeys to look for ways to improve all aspects of station operations, not just in music programming. Instead, an increasing number volunteered because of their deep love of music, and when this music came under attack, they were quicker to defend it than other areas of station operations. A good example of the more devoted WCWM disc jockey was the late 1970's staff member Rob Richards, who disc jockey Tom Brooke recalled "listened to *waaay* too much music. This was his life, and he was *excited* about it,…and he was looking for people who were excited about [music]."[192] Over time, this interest in providing esoteric or otherwise "alternative" music hardened until staff members adopted a more hostile "siege mentality" that pitted DJs interested in playing what they deemed important music against non-DJs and their supposedly poor musical taste. Brooke described the prevailing attitude of the early 1980's in this way: the staff thought that "we know what we're doing and these people [critics] are

[192] Thomas Wilcox Brooke interview, conducted by the author, June 28, 2006, Williamsburg, Virginia.

wrong….And you should listen to this music and even though you don't like it and never heard of it before you should listen to it."[193] By the 1980's, then, WCWM's management made programming decisions based less on the educational impact on its community than on its own personal aesthetic taste; listener interest was ancillary to the station's overall goal of broadcasting "quality" alternative music.

WCWM as a Campus Educator: 1977-1984

WCWM's transition into a predominantly non-mainstream music station began in earnest in the late 1970's beginning during Don Wilson's tenure as station manager from 1977 and 1978. Under Wilson's management, WCWM streamlined its programming into a more cohesive rock format. Additionally, it embraced its role as a musical educator; in response to claims that WCWM was alienating students with unappealing progressive and punk rock shows as well as unprofessional announcing, the station argued that "with music and art you should challenge yourself and listen to new things."[194] Staff members explained that WCWM was part of a liberal arts education that fostered creativity; WCWM's valuable educational license freed it from financial pressures to appeal only to the broadest segment of the public, and gave staff the opportunity to deliver to its listeners interesting music and informative news unavailable at commercial stations. Yet the station also was invested in its campus community; it aired campus news, public service announcements, and student-relevant discussions. Most importantly, WCWM modulated its former aggressively progressive, freeform stance into a one that incorporated popular music into its schedule.

As part of WCWM's new campaign to increase its visibility among students and the community, in February 1978, Don Wilson told *The Flat Hat* that WCWM was "trying to

[193] Brooke interview.
[194] Brooke interview.

increase contact with [its] audience, both actual and potential."[195] A listener survey revealed that with 56% of the students polled enjoying popular rock, "we were alienating a lot of listeners." In response, Wilson moved avant-garde progressive rock or specialty shows such as jazz, classical, and bluegrass from their prime-time slots and scheduled more mainstream rock music when most rock fans were listening. WCWM's 1978 music director, Peter Lane, admitted that whatever the educational value of more esoteric music, "most of these [musical] programs were not widely listened to, and...some were [of] admittedly 'poor'" quality.[196] Most importantly, Wilson distanced himself from WCWM's former reputation for musical snobbery and exclusiveness by refashioning the station's image as more open to listener preferences. He continued, "I don't want to run a clique….It used to be like that. Now, we don't party as much together, but we sure get a hell of a lot more done."[197]

While Don Wilson and others wished to appeal to a greater number of potential listeners, however, they refused to depart with their predominantly alternative radio sound. Although Wilson broadly defined "alternative radio" as a choice different from predictable commercial radio offerings, the directors and staff during the late 1970's and early 1980's did not apologize for the station's progressive programming. Peter Lane argued in *The Flat Hat* that college radio "in general has acted as a proving ground for 'new and less well-known music.'"[198] Lane and others claimed that WCWM provided an educational service by delivering quality music that commercial rock stations would soon pick up. The staff carefully chose examples of popular bands made famous on college stations so as to avoid threatening students with unfamiliar music, while simultaneously making listeners more receptive to an eclectic programming sound. The

[195] Don Wilson, quoted in Cathy Lint, "WCWM: Aiming for the Ears," *The Flat Hat*,17 February 1978, 18.
[196] Brad Swope, "WCWM Hopes to Duplicate Last Year's Achievements," *The Flat Hat*, 20 October 1978, 16.
[197] Don Wilson, quoted in Lint 18.
[198] Swope 16.

station, then, argued that it could combine entertaining and accessible mainstream rock with musical education, by mixing "the lesser known with better known, 'top 100,'…resulting in an 'alternative' to the usual FM fare."[199]

Critics, however, continued to question WCWM's role on campus. In the spring of 1979, Monty Griffith-Mair, a WCWM talk show host, wrote a scathing editorial about the station's perceived weaknesses, citing its unprofessionalism, extremism, and attraction to "weird music" as reasons to "leave WCWM by the wayside and begin anew." In contrast to William and Mary, whose administration allowed WCWM to broadcast with little oversight, other universities "are raising provocative questions about the 'academic worth,' let alone the skyrocketing costs, of operating and maintaining their campus radio stations."[200] The letter was a call for action for students and the College to reevaluate the necessity and effectiveness of the station.

WCWM's efforts to counter Griffith-Mair's argument revealed a contradiction that would plague the station for years to come: the student management wanted to address all tastes, but it also wanted to educate listeners about what it believed was underappreciated music. Against Griffith-Mair's criticism that WCWM's music was inaccessible, incoming station manager John Dubel argued that on the contrary, WCWM encouraged musical diversity. Audience surveys helped clarify the station's "musical and public service philosophy….[In response to listener demands] we play the new groups and artists as well as older, but less well known music."[201] Rather than flatly claiming that WCWM's programming appealed to everyone, Dubel and Matt Zoller, 1978 to 1979 station manager, stated that for the station to restrict its broadcasting to commercial rock material would be ignoring WCWM's educational purpose. Zoller claimed that unlike commercial stations, whose goal was to constantly please audiences, WCWM's

[199] Swope 16.
[200] Monty Griffith-Mair, "On Campus," *The Flat Hat*, 30 March 1979, 11.
[201] John S. Dubel, "Management's Opinions," *The Flat Hat*, 6 April 1979, 8.

"educational and controversial programming often alienates listeners, but it is the role of WCWM to inform as well as entertain. To suggest WCWM pattern itself after [commercial stations such as] WBCI is like urging the [literary magazine] William and Mary **Review** to imitate **Reader's Digest**."[202] Dubel concurred that "to mimic a station such as [commercial station] WBCI would be foolish and also severely limit the artistic freedom of our disc jockeys."[203] In essence, disc jockeys were artists whose musical knowledge was a great benefit to the mass culture-saturated listener.

While each year new station management offered changing explanations of WCWM's mission, the general trend, however, remained that the station would appeal to a broad range of taste with its diverse musical programming. This claim was not convincing for some students, however, and every year another editorial debate appeared in *The Flat Hat* questioning the station's responsiveness to student needs. The fact that most students were indifferent to both the controversy and the station's playlist—as confirmed in a later student poll—did little to stem the flow of editorials. While *The Flat Hat*, with its established standards of journalism, regular publication, and long tradition of public service made its campus role clear, WCWM's purpose as a thought-provoking progressive station was not as evident to students. Therefore, the station's ambiguous position may have invited public criticism in the paper's editorial section. For example, in an April 1980 issue, *The Flat Hat* editor-in-chief John Bloom accused rising station manager Clay Cromley of supporting the "status quo with regard to [progressive] music programming." The station's policies, Bloom argued, encouraged elitism: "Because WCWM is commercial-free…it [feels it] need not be responsive to the musical orientation of the student body." Bloom feared that by concentrating the power to decide programming policy into the

[202] Matt Zoller, "WCWM Defense," *The Flat Hat*, 6 April 1979, 8-9.
[203] Dubel 8.

hands of a few DJs, "new wave, punk and other music appreciated by a vocal minority are given extensive airplay." He suggested that the station ignore the obscure bands "begging for airtime" and play instead what the student audience requested. Unfamiliar music was not inherently educational, Bloom argued; instead, WCWM should "be encouraged to play music…[that is] good stuff."[204]

Bloom and other students' contention that the station should mimic commercial radio programming frustrated station manager Clay Cromley, who in his answer to Bloom in April 1980 argued that what constituted "good" music was patently subjective. He wrote that "the earth support[s] a little over four billion different conceptions of what comprises the 'best' music."[205] Yet Cromley also stumbled over a contradiction with which previous staff had also struggled. He claimed that everyone was entitled to his or her own musical taste, but he also maintained that that WCWM offered a better opportunity for musical education than did a commercial station.

In his 1980 editorial Cromley continued to tack between these two claims. By labeling WCWM's programming a "difference in attitude," Cromley concluded that the station's philosophy was still accessible to all listeners. Being an alternative station "does not automatically mean weirded-out electric guitars and screaming vocalists. It simply means something other than what is programmed on the 22 area commercial FM stations." However, Cromley remained critical of commercial radio's complacence: "Perhaps I am mistaken," Cromley wrote, "but playing a song simply because it is popular does not strike me as either informative or educational." Airing new and underappreciated artists was "more in keeping both

[204] John Bloom, "WCWM—Is Anyone Listening?" *The Flat Hat*, 11 April 1980, 8.
[205] Clay Cromley, "WCWM Responds," *The Flat Hat,* 18 April 1980, 6.

with our purpose, as outlined in the [station's] charter, and with the purpose of a liberal education."[206]

However, neither Cromley nor the rest of WCWM's management concretely explained what constituted this educational experience. If what constituted quality music was only a matter of opinion, how could WCWM justify its expert position as a provider of music education? If WCWM truly had "something for everyone," then why did its staff persist in dividing "good" programming from supposedly inferior mainstream music? If the familiarity of the song precluded it from being educational, would not someone who for the first time heard a Top-40 song be "educated" by listening to it? Also, Cromley's claims that the station encouraged musical diversity obscured the fact that most of WCWM's programming was punk rock and progressive music oriented. Would a connoisseur of progressive and punk rock be educated by only listening to these genres as opposed to some other music selection? Was there anything preventing WCWM from playing Top-40 music other than its disc jockeys' musical preferences?

By the fall of 1980 the contradictions inherent in WCWM's programming philosophy came to a head. While in some articles the station lashed out against commercial radio, in others it attempted to appeal to Top-40 enthusiasts by broadening programming selection. For example, in the station's spread in *The Colonial Echo* yearbook, rather than emphasizing the service-oriented programs the station aired as part of its educational mandate, WCWM claimed it shouldered a very different responsibility: to awaken passive consumers of mass culture to the new sounds of progressive and punk rock. WCWM staff wrote that the station's duty was to "keep [music programming] away from the clichés of commercial radio." Unfortunately, staff members now felt listener interests obstructed WCWM's purpose. The station saw itself battling

[206] Cromley 6.

the close-mindedness of "the powers that be," which now included "their fellow students."[207] In essence, music had become the primary means by which the station educated its listeners about this alternative lifestyle, yet absent was a cogent explanation as to how music would bring about identifiable changes in listeners' political, social, or even aesthetic consciousness.

Yet in a *Flat Hat* article written in 1980, WCWM invited a wider segment of the listening community to explore the station; Cromley told reporter Cheryl Hogue that "what we really want to do is to get more people interested both as listeners and participants. We want to offer more to the campus community, professors, and administration as well as to the students."[208] While WCWM claimed that people with a range of political, organizational, and social interests could enjoy WCWM's offerings of new music, Cromley's comments aside, by the 1980's the station rhetoric became more inward-looking, offering disc jockeys the opportunity for self expression rather than a chance for listeners to hear on-air issues that directly affected them and their community. Indeed, in 1980 programming director Pati DeVries cut against the station's populist theme by affirming the announcer's supreme individualism: "doing shows is an egotistical sort of thing—it's great to get your voice on the air."[209]

WCWM and the College Radio Movement: 1984-1998

This new attitude coincided with a larger national radio movement. By the 1980's college radio's increasingly influential role in determining chart hits and major label successes dramatically reoriented noncommercial radio's role on campuses nationwide. Karen Schoemer wrote that during the 1980's and early 1990's the College Radio Movement fostered a

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[207] "Radio Station: There's a Choice: WCWM Provides a Good Alternative," *The Colonial Echo*, 1980, 208.
[208] Clay Cromley, quoted in Cheryl Hogue, "WCWM Rated an 'Alternative' Radio Station," *The Flat Hat*, 5 September 1980, 7.
[209] Pati DeVries, quoted in Matt Danilowicz, "'Challenge of Broadcasting' Draws DJs to WCWM," *The Flat Hat*, 30 January 1981, 2.

phenomenon in which "major labels have increasingly recognized college radio as a crucial promotional target, an important vehicle for breaking new bands into the mainstream." She continued that "college radio...has evolved from an autonomous, mostly underground medium run free-form style by college students into a streamlined operation that caters more and more to major-label product."[210] Arlene Dávila pinpoints this commodification of authenticity and the corresponding concept of alternativeness when she argues that "the reconstitution of individuals into consumers and populations into markets are central fields of cultural production."[211] While WCWM readily identified itself as a unique haven for William and Mary music enthusiasts, it also ensnared itself within the mechanics of the progressive radio industry by subscribing to rock magazines, taking trips to the College Music Journal annual alternative music conference and concert series in New York City, and aspiring to help "break" artists into the mainstream charts. Ironically, while WCWM claimed that its playlist of obscure, non-major label artists fulfilled a need for authenticity that commercial radio lacked, its participation in the progressive music industry reduced alternative music to just another consumer product, and its listeners to consumers, diluting the station's status as cultural conservator.

As it increasingly identified itself with a national college movement, WCWM's commitment to its immediate community became ambiguous. Indeed, in 1987, writers from *The Flat Hat* column "The Bottom Line" claimed that the station's loyalty belonged not to its audience but "to the Progressive Music Industry and the underground bands it produces. Disregard for reliable and respected avenues for the input of student opinion clearly illustrates

[210] Karen Schoemer, "College Radio Crosses Over," *Rolling Stone,* October 14, 1990, 135.
[211] Arlene Dávila, *Latinos, Inc.: The Marketing and Making of a People* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001) 2.

this."[212] While this article traded on sensationalism, it may be that WCWM did in fact alienate students by rapidly embracing a predominantly progressive and alternative music schedule, phasing out most non-music educational programs in favor of creating a more cohesive "alternative sound." Although WCWM staff members argued that the station allowed student disc jockeys to freely express their creative impulses, management seemed increasingly concerned with separating what was "quality" music from what was "trash." Ironically, creating a clear distinction between mainstream and alternative music echoed exactly the commercial radio trends that standardized and narrowed the range of music available on each station. While WCWM continued to tout itself as an alternative to what it perceived as Top-40 drivel, it mirrored the commercialization of many other college stations.

Educating the listener about the educational benefits of alternative music became WCWM's main goal by the mid-1980's. In the context of the late 1980's, the station staff equated avant-garde music with aesthetic education. For the staff, WCWM's charter requirements for informative programming was reinterpreted to justify the station's mission to give students access to new and interesting music as well as local and international news and information. Additionally, proclaiming its disc jockeys were authorities on obscure music, the station perhaps unconsciously fostered a corresponding air of exclusiveness. In 1984, station manager Kevin Hall described WCWM as decidedly separate from mainstream culture. He wrote in *The Colonial Echo* that "the station plays songs on an album that no one else does….We just don't appeal to the fifteen to eighteen year-old, middle class crowd."[213] This aesthetic distinction polarized commercial and "alternative" radio, and the station's educational justifications grew increasingly tenuous. While WCWM defended its alternative music by once

[212] Tim Curran, John Fedewa, and Eric Fedewa, "WCWM Doesn't Care About Students," *The Flat Hat*, 27 March 1987, 4.
[213] Kevin Hall, quoted in "WCWM 89.1: Time for a Relocation," *The Colonial Echo,* Fall 1984, 261.

again pointing to its diverse programming accessible to listeners throughout the week, it could not refrain from chastising those who wanted to hear mainstream music.

While the station staff argued that WCWM broadcast a broad range of music, this diversity unsurprisingly represented non-mainstream artists. In a 1988 report to the Publications Council, director Bryan Abraham wrote that "WCWM is a leader…in education in the region," yet his later description of the station's daily schedule belied his claim.[214] In outlining the number of hours per week the station allotted to each music genre, Abraham revealed that the station had a very narrowly defined conception of education, one that revolved around providing non-major label alternative rock to students accustomed to Top-40 music. While progressive music had 104 hours a week of programming, other shows featuring classical, jazz, and news only amounted to 43 hours out of a 168 hour broadcasting week.[215] Indeed, concerned listener Robert Garnier wrote to the *Flat Hat* in April 1987 that despite WCWM's claims for musical diversity, "specialty shows are offered at unpopular listening hours." Garnier also alleged that "only those…reflecting the [alternative music] attitudes and tastes of WCWM's management are given positions as DJs."[216] WCWM's educational philosophy was not as progressive as its staff proposed; only genres deemed acceptably non-mainstream were granted airtime.

Student and editorial staff criticism in *The Flat Hat* between 1984 and 1990 centered not on the station's educational aspects, which included regular news segments and public service announcements, but on the seeming paradox between WCWM's claims that it fostered general music appreciation while it categorically rejected non-mainstream records. These debates reflected a wider noncommercial broadcasting issue: as college stations increasingly invited disc

[214] Brian Abraham, "Memorandum Regarding the Past, Present, and the Future of WCWM-FM at the College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, VA," 26 February 1988, 4. Swem Library, Williamsburg, Virginia.
[215] Abraham 9.
[216] Robert L. Garnier, *The Flat Hat*, 10 April 1987, 8.

jockeys to craft their own, intimately personal shows as an extension of their creative identity, the concept of being a noncommercial educational station lost the meaning it contained in previous years.

While the station may have embraced certain aspects of commercial radio, namely its entertainment, single genre format, this did not mean that students should have forced WCWM to embrace mainstream music. This would be akin to pressuring a commercial country station to change its format to jazz: ostensibly other stations existed with a different format, and duplicating one station's playlist would saturate the market. Critics such as the 1987 *Flat Hat* Bottom Line writers held that the station should emulate commercial radio listener polls in attempt to increase responsiveness to listeners' needs.[217] Yet the "scientific" demographic surveys commercial stations conducted have been criticized for creating a feedback loop in which songs played are perpetually requested, forming an increasingly narrow playlist.[218] The columnists also ignored the fact that despite emerging similarities, WCWM was not a commercial station, but followed very different policies and mandates. As an educational, noncommercial station, allowing listeners to decide their own programming—i.e., convert the station's programming to mainstream rock—would jeopardize WCWM's ability to inform and enlighten audiences. The Bottom Line and other critics suggested that what was unpopular, be it music or non-music programming, was necessarily "bad." Under this line of thinking, any controversial program, news broadcast, public service announcement, or music selection that the students felt unpleasant could be discarded, regardless of the validity of its content or critique.

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[217] Tim Curran, John Fedewa, and Eric Fedewa 4.

[218] Eric Rothenbuhler and Tom McCourt, "Radio Redefines Itself, 1947-1962," in *Radio Reader*, ed. Michele Hilmes and Jason Loviglio (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 368, 381. See also Susan J. Douglas, *Listening in: Radio and the American Imagination* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 348-349.

Additionally, critics often overlooked that commercial radio's alliance is often not with listeners; its programming is designed to assure reliable profits for both the station and to the music industry. Ideally, noncommercial radio is immune from these financial pressures and can therefore afford to program with the best interests of the public in mind. Duplicating the often purely entertainment-centered format of the commercial station would violate the station's charter and FCC license, which mandates regular programming of informational and unique content. WCWM's existence as an alternative from such programming would have been imperiled were it to follow The Bottom Line and other critics' perhaps consciously provocative suggestions.

Significantly, older 1960's notions of educational radio persisted in station rhetoric. Although during the early 1970's student staff had consciously rejected the idea that a coterie of decision-makers should disseminate high-culture ideals, WCWM continued to struggle with similar concerns. Station editorials suggested, just as faculty managers had argued twenty years previously, that WCWM would educate listeners on appropriately high quality music, and would not acquiesce to students clamoring for familiar Top-40 hits. Rather than presenting and alleviating student concerns, the station often further exacerbated the very issues it attempted to ameliorate. While staff pointed out that "obscure" music could be just as enjoyable and rewarding as Top-40 selections, they often couched their argument in contradictory and elitist terms. For example, although station manager Karen Schoemer's 1986 editorial "In Defense of Obscurity" acknowledged that music taste "all comes down to what you're into," she nonetheless constructed a hierarchical value system that positioned Top-40 and alternative rock in opposition. Despite her claim that musical taste was subjective, the crux of her article was that WCWM's "obscurity eggheads" were more knowledgeable about important music than the

listener, and therefore had the authority to determine "good" music for the audience. She continued that without WCWM, "not one of you" would have heard of now popular bands like REM, U2, General Public, INXS, and the Smiths "because college radio…is responsible for their ascent to the Big Time."[219]

As may be seen in Schoemer's editorial, WCWM staff members were uncertain about the station's responsibility to its listeners. All, however, were unwilling to allow non-DJs to dictate the station's musical trends because they felt the threat of mainstream music to WCWM's musical integrity was too great. Indeed, in 1986 Schoemer wrote that commercial radio made her "think of a lot of big hefty major record label executives rubbing their hands together greedily because they're going to make a big fat load of money when [an] album sells a billion trillion copies."[220] While some disc jockeys pointed to the station's diverse musical programs as "something for everyone," others rejected outside calls for programming reform for its possibly restrictive effects on creative freedom. A March 1987 letter from disc jockeys Nick Aynsley and Marc Masters questioned the legitimacy of student concerns: "we wonder what the purpose of a student opinion poll by WCWM would be. What could be asked for that that station doesn't already offer?"[221] Many also invited unsatisfied listeners to join WCWM, conveniently overlooking the fact that those unhappy with programming did not necessarily want to become DJs, they only wanted programming to change to suit their musical preferences. For example, in 1987, Schoemer and newly appointed station manager Leigh Tillman wrote that "students who have viable opinions as to what goes over the airwaves are urged to participate in the running of the radio station and formulate their own program."[222] While their frustration with uninvolved

[219] Karen Schoemer, "In Defense of Obscurity," *The Flat Hat*, 14 November, 1986, 7.
[220] Schoemer, "In Defense of Obscurity," 7.
[221] Nick Aynsley and Marc Masters, *The Flat Hat*, 3 March 1987, 4.
[222] Karen Schoemer and Leigh Tillman, "WCWM Responds to Criticism," *The Flat Hat*, 3 March 1987, 4.

critics was clear, their tone hinted that programming would not be altered by the general public, but only by involved disc jockeys.

WCWM and the Commercial Niche Market: 1999 to the present

While in the 1980's the staff was more or less unified in its acceptance of WCWM as an alternative music bastion, by the 1990's some increasingly vocal disc jockeys complained that decision-making powers were too centralized within the station directorships. These disgruntled staff members occasionally denounced WCWM's musical programming in public forums such as *The Flat Hat*. At the heart of these debates were the competing interests of individual taste versus public good. While WCWM leadership had framed its educational mission exclusively in terms of musical appreciation since the mid-1970s, the late 1990's saw staff members relate to WCWM in increasingly personal, introspective, and subjective ways. If the station now provided a means by which students could express their personal musical tastes, what had happened to the station's history of public service? Staff members objected to leadership's demand that WCWM remain on the "fringe" of the music industry, and argued that the station should be more inclusive. Leadership now focused on re-educating general staff members into appreciating alternative rock. Resigned to and somewhat relishing the station's small listenership base, WCWM management argued that the station offered a unique opportunity for individual musical and self-discovery.

As the 1990's progressed, station tension mounted as management overlooked or misread signs of staff dissatisfaction with programming policy as general misbehavior. While station directors argued that WCWM's music offerings provided an invaluable opportunity for staff musical education, some disc jockeys felt that the directors unfairly placed themselves as musical experts, demanding that the staff conform to their conception of quality alternative programming,

regardless of the disc jockey's own musical tastes. Certain disc jockeys advocated a relaxed atmosphere in which staff could play the music they wanted—which sometimes included mainstream hits—without directors monitoring their shows for a sufficiently alternative sound. For instance, in 1999, tired of the constant admonitions to play more alternative albums, one disc jockey asked the directors to "cut [us] some slack. At least [DJs] are expanding their music repertoire like you wanted them to do so badly."[223] Her letter was met by approval from other staff members, who wrote in the margins of her entry, "thank you for voicing what many DJs here have thought for years. We play by the rules [by fulfilling playlist requirements],—please just let us do our jobs from there."[224]

Disillusioned staff felt that far from being democratic, the directors dictated the station sound, and in an effort to sustain WCWM's alternative image, severely limited the disc jockeys' autonomy. In fact, station log entries regularly equated directors with authoritarians, dictators, and other repressive entities. One typical letter read: "To Adolf 'Nick' Hitler [:] Dude, who died and made you fascist dictator of WCWM?"[225] Staff members, as they periodically confronted management, disputed the directors' claim that all disc jockeys played an active role in determining the station's programming through their musical knowledge, ability to vote on and select music for the station's playlist, and unity in forging a common goal. Another log entry, from September 2000, explicitly raised general doubts about disc jockey participation. The entry explained that the disc jockey provided input on station policy because "I know nothing I say will change anything." He even stopped attending music listening meetings, a weekly session during which staff voted on music to be added to the station playlist, because "sitting in a hot studio for an hour listening to music I had no interest in on a Friday afternoon was not worth it.

[223] Anonymous, Station Log, March 21, 1999. Swem Library. Williamsburg, Virginia.
[224] Anonymous, Station Log, undated, from March, 1999. Swem Library. Williamsburg, Virginia.
[225] Anonymous, Station Log, March 21, 1999. Swem Library. Williamsburg, Virginia.

It occurred to me early on that it didn't matter if I came or not."[226] In fact, music director Charlie Wilmoth's response made leadership prerogatives very clear: "this 'debate' [about incorporating less obscure music into the playlist] probably won't be 'resolved'…any time soon. Such a change would hurt the station. Thanks for your comments, though."[227] The station leadership hinted that this controversy would end only if dissatisfied DJs either continued to play heavy rotation songs without complaint or quit the station. Unfortunately, the directors' categorical response to staff concerns made it clear that sustaining the station's alternative role had little to do with listener or staff interests. Music directors had no intention of altering the content of the playlist, changing the way music was added to the heavy rotation, or listening to other suggestions if such changes would threaten WCWM's position as strictly non-mainstream.

Disc jockeys also criticized this anti-commercial mentality, which they argued alienated more listeners than it gained. Although the station posted fliers and publicized the station in print media, often this publicity widened ideological divides between alternative college rock enthusiasts and non-DJ students. In many instances the station cultivated its outsider status, battling against crass popular culture and commercial radio. In the fall semester of 2000, for example, the station proposed this bumper sticker slogan: "WCWM: If you like listening to us, then we haven't done our job."[228] While many directors and staff members felt the slogan accurately reflected the station's limited audience numbers as well as its consciously irreverent humor, some disc jockeys strongly objected to the overt elitism of the sticker.

Staff proselytized to the unconverted, hoping to sway listeners brainwashed by Top-40 offerings. Its frequent editorials in *The Flat Hat* and spreads in *The Colonial Echo* presented WCWM as lone agent, fighting against the all-consuming evil of mainstream entertainment. In

[226] Ned, Station Log, undated, probably September 15, 2000. Swem Library. Williamsburg, Virginia.
[227] Charlie Wilmoth, Station Log, September or October 2000. Swem Library. Williamsburg, Virginia.
[228] Anonymous, Station Log, Fall 2000. Swem Library. Williamsburg, Virginia.

1999, for example, the station published an article describing itself as "long [being] the underdog, waging an uphill battle to open eyes, ears, and minds."[229] The next year the station trumpeted that its numbers had increased through its recruitment and "propaganda" efforts; "more and more William and Mary students felt the need to resist the artistically stagnant musical artists supported by the commercial music industry."[230]

While the station claimed it was in staunch opposition to mainstream radio and offered "quality" music, WCWM's alternative rock format followed a trend established by many other college stations. A whole industry had emerged courting to the college music director: record promoters promised free concert tickets and memorabilia, college rock was its own genre in *Billboard*, and noncommercial stations regularly sent representatives to college radio conventions where in exchange for a hefty entrance fee, participants had free access to concerts and after-parties.[231] WCWM availed itself of these alternative music scene benefits, which now overshadowed its commitment to responding to listener needs. Staff rarely discussed non-music features that examined or addressed community issues; by the 2000's, the station no longer had a regular news program.[232]

Music directors felt that the station's reputation as an alternative music haven would be threatened if they allowed disc jockeys complete creative control. Charlie Wilmoth, WCWM's 2000 to 2001-era station manager, advised college stations to safeguard against mainstream tendencies in their staff. The directors' role as alternative music gatekeepers was especially important since "DJs will often only play music they've heard about elsewhere, which makes

[229] "WCWM," *The Colonial Echo*, Fall 1999, 209. Swem Library. Williamsburg, Virginia.
[230] "WCWM," *The Colonial Echo*, Fall 2000, 202. Swem Library. Williamsburg, Virginia.
[231] Charlie Wilmoth, "Ways to be a Better Music Director," *Dusted Magazine*. http://www.dustedmagazine.com/features/84.
[232] "WCWM" program flyer, 2002. Swem Library. Williamsburg, Virginia.

college radio more of an arm of the major media machine than an alternative to it."[233] As the general staff agitated for more control over playlist selection, music directors reacted violently. For example, in 1999, music director Nick wrote, "I'm sick of people trying to convince me that there are only 10 good songs on [the station playlist]. If you really think that, then you're an idiot."[234] In response to yet another plea for a more inclusive playlist, he wrote, "yeah, [the current playlist] sure is worse than that [commercial fare] Blink 182, Everclear, and Bush you played on your show….If you really have a problem with it, come to music listening and vote if you can manage to tear yourself away from your MTV."[235]

Yet fellow director Charlie Wilmoth contradicted Nick's claim that disc jockeys could use listening meetings as a redress of grievances when he griped that "just because seven trainees or DJs, whatever, think [a CD] should go on [the playlist] after hearing 30 seconds of it [at listening meetings] doesn't mean it's good." Wilmoth implied that general staff opinion did not have the same authority as his musical expertise, which allowed him to judge after merely "10-20 minutes" of listening to the albums record companies mailed the station whether or not the music was appropriate for the station's playlist.[236] A year later disagreements between staff and management persisted. In 2001, a DJ complained that during one session she tried to vote for an album but it was "laughed off and discarded without a vote. This also happened a few weeks ago. [The discarded album] is very good in my opinion."[237] Wilmoth responded, "you're right, Maria. That's definitely a big problem. Why are you listening to such terrible CDs?" Despite attempts at humor, Wilmoth further marginalized the disc jockey's opinions by explaining that the music directors personally removed CDs without voting on them "because Nick and I can tell

[233] Wilmoth "Ways to be a Better Music Director."
[234] Nick, Station Log, March 21, 1999. Swem Library. Williamsburg, Virginia.
[235] Nick, Station Log, September 2000. Swem Library. Williamsburg, Virginia.
[236] Charlie Wilmoth, Station Log, Fall 2000. Swem Library. Williamsburg, Virginia.
[237] Maria, Station Log, Spring 2001. Swem Library. Williamsburg, Virginia.

that practically everyone hates that CD.…If [that album] didn't even get to a vote, trust me, it wouldn't have [been] added anyway….Sorry you felt disenfranchised, or something."[238] If the listening meeting functioned as an open forum for music listening, the fact that the music director denigrated staff taste confirmed that the management, not the general staff, was the ultimate authority on acceptably alternative music.

Then, in November 2001, a dramatic event forced station management to reevaluate WCWM's responsibility to its staff and community. What began as a relatively innocuous article on what WCWM DJ and *The Flat Hat* columnist Dan Miller believed to be music industry pretentiousness quickly evolved into a full-blown scandal. When Miller made a passing reference to WCWM, in which he referred to the staff as "too-cool" and claimed they pushed inaccessible avant-garde music to an unwilling public, station management exploded, exposing the station's hyper-sensitivity to criticism.[239]

Directors immediately launched a two-pronged counter-attack; WCWM management published an editorial in the student newspaper and also addressed Miller's comments point-by-point in the station log book. Interestingly, while *The Flat Hat* only published one rebuttal before dropping the issue, the managers prolonged the issue for many pages in the log book, providing WCWM staff with an extensive refutation of Miller's piece. Yet they could not fully dismiss Miller's accusations; Miller later elaborated that "I honestly feel like I am looked down upon [by the station staff] when I admit to liking popular music….I stand by my article when I say that there are elitist pressures. Denying them is pointless. I feel them during music listening when people openly bash music I like. Almost everyone…are guilty of that."[240] Yet rather than investigating his claims, the staff used the article as fodder for its outsider image. In fact, four

[238] Charlie Wilmoth, Station Log, Spring 2000. Swem Library. Williamsburg, Virginia.
[239] Dan Miller, "Critical Condition," *The Flat Hat*, November 9, 2001.
[240] Dan Miller, Station Log, November 2001.

years later the event had grown to mythic proportions; directors related the story to their new staff as evidence of the station's permanently misunderstood status.[241]

Despite Miller's assurances that he valued the station's eclectic music, WCWM directors Charlie Wilmouth, Clarke Boehling, Ariel Acosta, Emily Manley, Paul Gilbert, Jerimee Richir, Adam Kissick, and Paul Brewer nevertheless wrote a long editorial to *The Flat Hat*, reiterating their intentions to "focus on a wide variety of music you may not have heard before, including lesser-known rock, hip-hop, jazz and techno, as well as experimental and traditional music from all over the world." They argued that far from appealing to a few independent or alternative music enthusiasts, "most of our callers thank us for playing something different. Some have even told us they've learned more about music and culture from listening to us than they ever could have by listening to commercial radio." They outlined WCWM's intent to honor listener requests while also giving the listener the opportunity to "hear something they probably never would have heard otherwise."[242]

While this defense clearly explained WCWM's motives, it did not elucidate why musical education was necessary in an age of predictable and narrowly defined commercial radio genres. The Miller controversy reflects the fact that although WCWM's conception of "good" music had changed, the fundamental questions about educational radio still persisted. Why did the managers believe their music programming was inherently educational? How did it expand the listener's mind? Was it the music's aesthetic properties? Proposed emotional depth? Political message? The managers did not explain what made this alternative music compelling to the community other than that it was different from mainstream music by virtue of its relative lack of commercial success. If the bands WCWM aired became overnight sensations, would they still

[241] Diana Price, personal correspondence, 2004.
[242] Charlie Wilmoth, et al., "College Radio Station's Programming Focuses on Variety," *The Flat Hat* (November 16, 2001), http://flathat.wm.edu/November162001/opinionsstory4.shtml.

retain musical and educational merit or would the station discard them as the next mainstream pop artist? And if the station argued that it delivered music unmediated by the restrictive atmosphere of commercial radio stations and major record labels, it cannot be overlooked that the station received its new albums from the music industry, albeit from much smaller labels. Did the station's existence as "just another choice" for music listeners constitute a sufficiently educational purpose?

Ultimately, the station's answers to these questions reinforced its nominal status as an educational station. Providing a service to the community became limited to music the station leaders liked at the moment: the quest for personal fulfillment trumped any effort to connect to the wider listening community. The alternative music it broadcasted was merely one facet of the student volunteers' alternative lifestyle; listener tastes were irrelevant in the mission to program a certain subgenre of rock music. In essence, it was no different from a commercial station targeting a specific market. Operating for a niche market—perhaps only for the disc jockeys themselves—the station programmed alternative music as a way to support the staff's oppositional identity.

Conclusion

WCWM has changed dramatically from its first incarnation as a ten-watt faculty-led radio station in 1959. The station has transformed from an administrative public relations tool and student laboratory to an extracurricular club with minimal university supervision. Most significantly, its erstwhile function as a public educator has changed to a provider of musical entertainment. While the station once promised cultural and civic education to its Williamsburg audience, WCWM now airs predominantly alternative music to an area covering thirty square miles, with an extended network of fans from around the world listening via the station's live online radio broadcasts.

Throughout its history, WCWM has responded to wider noncommercial broadcasting debates over how to most effectively educate the American public. While during the 1950's and early 1960's noncommercial stations hoped cultural and civic education would aid in constructing an American national identity. The highly centralized organizational structure of educational stations had positioned radio instructors as the ultimate authority on what audiences should learn. These instructors, however, often overlooked the diverse needs and experiences of their target population, conceiving of an Anglo-America that precluded diversity of opinion and experience. By the 1960's, university students questioned this traditional educational model in classrooms and media, and, as they demanded more control over their lives on campus, also challenged noncommercial stations to create programming relevant to the changing political, social, and economic times. After WCWM emerged in 1972 as a student-operated station, its programming content began to reflect the radical educational view that radio could have value to all listeners, regardless of socioeconomic background.

Yet, by the 1980's, the station's social commitment to the public had largely faded, and WCWM, along with other college radio stations, began promoting musical education as the primary responsibility of their operations. As these stations connected to the College Radio Movement, community involvement was secondary to bringing alternative, non-mainstream music to an audience familiar only with the predictable Top-40 format. The importance of maintaining a unique, "authentic" identity separate from this homogenous commercial model was paramount, and station staff united to educate WCWM's audience about a wider variety of music.

Within the past ten years, however, the station has abandoned its educational origins altogether. While it once mandated original programming relevant to student and community political, social, and economic issues, WCWM now broadcasts for the sake of broadcasting. Student volunteers join the station for personal enjoyment rather than out of a deep-seated sense of civic duty. The reasons for this are plentiful, reflecting national and local trends. On the campus level, this transformation is partly the product of waning staff interest in programming regular news, public affairs shows, and discussions. While WCWM once transcended its physical space, functioning as a community for likeminded idealists, the station is now merely an instrument for expressing individual musical tastes. WCWM conforms to a music-based format mostly out of habit; the lack of historical knowledge about the station, the difficulty of maintaining a directorial staff with consistent goals, and the lack of contemporary models for educational broadcasting have resulted in a station either unaware of alternatives or unwilling to change.

On a national level, the distinction between noncommercial and commercial radio stations has become blurred, with NPR and community-based public stations adopting

commercial models in an attempt to stay solvent.[243] Additionally, the Telecommunications Act of 1996 deregulated the radio industry, and sparked, as Susan Douglas argues, "merger mania."[244] With no restrictions on radio ownership, large conglomerates have formed a vast network of "mutually exclusive auditory niches."[245] These tightly-controlled genre formats displaced the unpredictable and challenging freeform programs of the 1960's and 1970's, pressuring stations to conform to a single category of music. WCWM has unwittingly modeled itself after these stations. While WCWM and other college stations broadcast mostly non-major label music, thereby casting themselves as alternatives to these formulaic commercial stations, their playlists encourage, Douglas fears, cultural segregation, not education.[246] Although WCWM claims it promotes musical diversity, the station has in some sense limited musical experimentation by dividing its schedule into distinct genres. With little genre overlap, it perpetuates the commercial mantra that musical categories are sacrosanct.

WCWM has also become embroiled in a debate relevant to many noncommercial and commercial broadcasters alike: does radio matter anymore? WCWM has battled student apathy and low listenership rates for decades, but its relevance to students as a musical educator becomes increasingly tenuous as it involves itself less in immediate campus life. Significantly, the rise of participatory media such as internet radio, podcasts, mp3 players, and other devices has encouraged students to circumvent radio altogether. In light of these alternatives, some people have begun to question the often erratically-programmed and understaffed station's

[243] Jack Mitchell, "Lead Us Not Into Temptation: American Public Radio in a World of Infinite Possibilities," in *Radio Reader*, eds. Michele Hilmes and Jason Loviglio (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 416.
[244] Susan Douglas, *Listening in: Radio and the American Imagination* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 351.
[245] Douglas 349.
[246] Douglas 354.

position as a disseminator of new music.[247] Yet understanding WCWM's history as a product of staff, faculty, and administrative negotiations and confrontations can ensure the station's survival. WCWM is not unique in its transformation: it is part of a larger debate over noncommercial radio's role as cultural educator. Throughout its 48-year history WCWM has challenged educational, cultural, and civic assumptions, at each turn reasserting its commitment to informing its public. That each generation of the station's staff responded to these national issues by generating programming relevant their own experiences is a testament to the vitality and necessity of noncommercial radio.

Should, then, the station return to this consciously "educational" format? Perhaps the only way to justify its existence in such a media-saturated age is to return to community-relevant issues, and to program nonmusical material that reflects the needs of the campus and town population. However, to those who argue that musical education is obsolete with new music a click of the mouse away, WCWM still exists as an expression of musical enthusiasm, and a hope that "somewhere, someone will learn something new."[248]

[247] Chelsea Rudman, "WCWM Hopping Up the Radio Dial," *The Flat Hat*, vol. 96, issue 4 (16 September 2006) http://flathat.wm.edu/2006-09-15/story.php?type=3&aid=1.
[248] Joshua Specht, personal communication with the author, April 19 2007.

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